STORIES FROM A KID WHO JUST KNOWS MOM AND DAD WILL COME BACK FOR HIM...

WAITING ON THE WALL

HARRY CLAYTON

WAITING ON THE WALL

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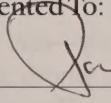

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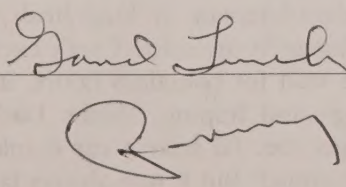

Foreword

ACTS 17:26

From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

The beautiful farmhouse above is an old photograph given to me by my grandparents. If you look closely, sitting on the stone wall is a little boy—me. Dennis Hill, a very dear friend, sketched me into the photo as I sat with tears in my eyes, telling him my story. The more Dennis understood my reason for sitting there, the clearer my image became.

Why had my parents divorced? And even worse, why didn't either of them want their home to be mine, too? Wasn't I worthy of their love? Were their lives so full that they had no place for me? As a child, I never unraveled the vast mystery surrounding my abandonment. A hush-hush matter, it always guaranteed a change in the subject with each person I asked. So, I sat on the wall for countless hours. It was my favorite spot for waiting—and hoping. Maybe Dad or Mom would come back to get me. I'd hear a car coming and I'd think, "Hey! Here they come!" But it was always Jake Huffman, our

local mailman, or some neighbor passing by. As months turned into years, I finally gave up waiting.

The house is still there. Like me, age has taken its toll and changed its appearance. The stone wall—built by my great grandfather—that served as my lookout, still guards the gate. But my parents and grandparents have gone to be with the Lord, and all that remains are the memories of Waiting on The Wall.

I can see now that life with my grandparents was good. How nice it would have been if I'd used my own heartaches to avoid passing on the hurt to those I loved as an adult. But sadly, that's not what happened.

As we relive my life's journey together, I hope you'll cry and laugh, a lot. God knows I've done my share of both. And if my story inspires you, please stop a moment to thank God. He is the only answer to all problems and hurt, and the source of every joy.

Dedication

Most authors struggle with the dedication of their book . Being in the publishing business, I have seen them honor their secretary, mother, best friend, great grandfather or grandmother or someone else who had place a significant role in their life.

There have been a lot of these folks in my life too, but the one who stands out above all is my best friend and wife Nancy. She has been my nurse; my confidant and my buddy all wrapped up in one. She has seen me laugh and cry in the same day and then fall to my knees in prayer in the evening.

Nan (as she is known now) has been beside me as I mourned the death of my loved ones and has rejoiced with me as we welcomed new birth into our lives. This lady has seen me fall but always has extended her hand to help me back up. I know not what the future holds in store for me but I do know I want Nan to be in every moment of it. When the time comes for God to call me home to be with Him, and share in eternal life I will thank Him and proclaim "Nan helped me do it Lord."

I love you sweet lady, not only for what you have done but for who you are and for what you have helped me be.

"I LOVE THE EARTH ON WHICH YOU TROD"

Pappy

Introduction

The past six decades of my life have taken me some interesting places–from the coffee fields of South America to the Garden Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ in Jerusalem. I've traveled many million miles. I've dined with Roger Smith, Chairman of the Board of GM. I've had coffee with Charlton Heston, and fished for catfish and river suckers with Freddie Stewart.

I don't want to brag, but I think my life and travels have been interesting, and a lot of the stories will go untold unless I record them now before my memory fails me.

Who could be interested in the life of a poor farm boy from Pennsylvania? The truth is out: This book is therapy for the author as well as some memories for his children and grandchildren. I hope to preserve some nostalgia of the past sixty-plus years, and to prove that not every book needs a plot to keep the reader's interest!

Stories may sometimes wander indiscriminately from birth to present, from happiness to sadness. And some (note I say some) will contain a little embellishment when true memory fails me. But they've all have had an impact in the many seasons of my life.

The characters are all real, the names unchanged. While I don't try to ridicule my ancestors or exact sympathy for our poverty, I make no excuses for anyone. If at times I sound bitter, sad, or delirious with joy, then I've probably conveyed my true feelings.

Hopefully, you'll live my life with me as you read and learn that love can be for the finding. As one good friend told me later in my life; "Harry, God uses man's disappointments in life as His opportunities." God is everywhere—in the good times and the bad.

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The Early Years
1940-1950

In the Beginning

So, where in the world is Waynesburg, Pennsylvania and who cares? Well, for those who may have a little curiosity, it is a small town in the southwest corner of Pennsylvania with population of two thousand people, at that time.

On Wednesday, March 27 at 9:30 PM in Waynesburg Pennsylvania, Dr. Grover Powell spanked my bare butt in the Greene County hospital and told my mother and Grandma Flossie, "It's a boy." Since Dad was in the service at the time, I'm not sure if he was there for my birth or got the news by phone.

Granny always told me I was born early, but I know premature babies don't weigh nine plus pounds. I also know that Granny had better math skills, but family pride outweighed them. Unplanned pregnancies are as old as time, but they weren't supposed to happen in a close community like ours.

Although Waynesburg was my birthplace, most of the stories of my childhood come from an even smaller town called Pine Bank, only 16 miles to the south. Nothing important ever happened in this little village. No famous battles were fought there, or gold discovered in the hills, but to me it was the Big Apple of Greene County.

In Pine Bank, everyone knew who was sick, a new baby was big news, and the whole community mourned the death of a neighbor. There was no segregation either, as we all

loved the Grinnage family, the only black folks in the valley.

The air was clean, you could drink the water in the streams, and to get a clear view of the sky, you only had to look straight up. This was hill country, but to the farmers who still worked the land with horses, it was the Kansas plains with Delta silt.

These were the days of rationed gasoline and coffee, as our small community still struggled to overcome the poverty of the Great Depression and World War II. Franklin Roosevelt was our president. We were all just common folks who shared the fruit of the land—milk straight from the cow, meat from our own livestock, and bread from Granny's oven.

A battery-operated Silvertone radio brought us hillbilly music, Lowell Thomas, and Gabriel Heeter with the evening news. We cranked our telephones and turned on the lights with a match, and believed that patched clothes were not a disgrace, as long as they were clean.

My mother and father didn't get a good start in married life, with my being a surprise and Dad in the Army. Their marriage ended soon after my birth. I'm still missing many details, because the "mystery" was never explained to me. And although I have a good memory, it doesn't go back to thirteen months old, when my universe began to unravel.

Granny was really the first person I remember loving that loved me back. The story she told me was that mother brought me to visit in April 1941 and never came back to claim me. Since then, I have read many horror stories of children raised in orphanages, abandoned in dumpsters, and left without anyone. In comparison, I can't complain about my situation—I had Pap and Granny Orndoff.

Not only did I have Pap and Granny to love me, I also had Uncle Bob, who was like a brother to me. Uncle Bob—or Bobby as everyone called him—was my mother's younger brother.

Bobby was only nine years older, so in many ways we grew up together. Bobby taught me how to hunt and fish, smoke cigarettes and swear, just a little. Granny was a church going, God-fearing Methodist and didn't believe in speaking "bad talk." On the other hand, Pap's swearing vocabulary was so superior to ours, he never even noticed. Nevertheless, Granny always told me "Old Scratch" would get me for swearing.

"Boots" was my first border collie; "Bill" and "Maude" our big gray work horses. And how could I ever forget "Spotty" and "Star," Granny's prize milk cows? Our closest neighbors were Lindsey and Flora Henderson to the south, Charley and Dorothy Williard to the north, and Uncle Delbert and Aunt Dale Orndoff to the west.

A mile didn't seem far then, even if you had to walk —my only mode of transportation. My childhood held few summer camps, vacations at the beach, or family trips to visit relatives. But I knew a lot of hay baling, work in the sawmill, and hoeing the garden in the evening after a full day of work in the sun. Pap believed the only time you should ever say "No" was when he had asked you, "Have you had enough work for one day?"

Being raised by my grandparents resulted in my missing a whole generation who lived in mellower times than they. I regret that my childhood focused so much on discipline and hard work, because it led me to pass on the same lifestyle to my children. I heard Pap say many times, "You'll never amount to anything!" Although these memories are harsh, better things were to come.

The Orndoff reunion was The Event of the year (with the Jacktown Fair coming in second). I remember these reunions were the only time when we got to visit with all our relatives and get a day off. Food filled table after table, as the Orndoff family loved to eat—with figures to prove it. Everyone would eat until stuffed. Then the younger kids went swimming or played ball while the adults would sit around and talk about

how hard they'd had to work as kids and how lazy our generation was!

Uncle Bob, and his girlfriend Dixie Parson (who later became his wife), took me for the first time to the Jacktown Fair when I was about eight. I enjoyed my first ride on a Ferris wheel—which I thought was as tall as a mountain—ate some cotton candy, and knocked off two of the three milk bottles balanced on top of a milkcan. Although I didn't receive a prize for my pitching efforts, I remember getting the nod of approval from Bobby, which was better than any teddy bear I could have chosen. That fair was like the World's Fair to me, and no matter how many times I returned, I always thought of my first trip with Bobby and Dixie.

Those Hoge Boys

Psalm 41:9
Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

I guess I was almost six years old when we got our first new neighbors. Ray and June Hoge moved into the Doctor Murray place at the foot of the hill. I was delighted to see they had three boys, which meant I now had playmates. Ronnie was my age, Jerry and Richard were younger. I was old enough to go to their house to play, but had to be home before dark and couldn't stay for supper without Granny's consent.

The Hoge family, like all of us, had a tough time financially, but they had love—and that was all that mattered. Ray went to work for Pap in the timber business as a truck driver, hauling the lumber to Pittsburgh and other places while June stayed at home with the kids. I'll never forget her home-baked bread, fresh out of the oven. If you've never had hot bread with creamy butter and blackberry jam, you've missed one of the finer things in life.

The Hoge boys were great playmates. One day we'd be wild desperados of the west and other days we'd be Caterpillar and truck operators. Our guns were sticks and my Radio Flyer wagon and a red scooter Ronnie's dad had picked up from a dump served as our tractors and trucks. On one of those days when we were riding the old west trails, we

thought it'd be neat if we had a "chaw" like the cowboys. I emptied washers from a little white cloth sack in Pap's garage and filled it with tobacco we shredded from one of Pap's King Edward cigar butts. Then off we went to hunt bandits, stopping under the Maple trees for the "chaw". It didn't take long until we were sicker than any plague the settlers might have suffered. (Granny and June always thought we'd eaten too many green apples.) Well, we survived to ride the trails many more times, but always without taking another chaw.

Another time, we played below their house where Kenneth Evans had pasturing cattle. The fence was so run down that Kenneth had put up an electric fence to hold his cows. Ronnie and I had some experience with that fence. We took hold of it one day to see what it would do. We found out. We tried to get Jerry to touch it, but he smelled a rat and didn't trust us with that idea. Finally we'd about given up on the idea when I suggested if Jerry was afraid to touch it he should just pee on it. He accepted my challenge and cast his fountain of youth on the wire. ZAP! He yelled so loud that you could hear him all the way to Lindsey Henderson's. It scared us half to death. Worst of all, he ran to the house holding what we thought was gone and told his mother what had happened. I never dared anyone to do that again, perhaps because of the willow switching we got that night.

The First Day of School

1946

School started in September because all the summer work was done and there was nothing else for kids to do in the fall. Yeah, right.

September. Leaves turned gold and red, hickory nuts and walnuts ripened, and Lindsey's corn stood shocked in the field. The hay was stacked, potatoes dug, and Granny's canning shelves groaned with the summer's harvest. September. Time to get the kids from under foot and lock 'em up in school. This year would always be special, though—it was my first.

What a day to remember, and how well I do. I hopped out of bed early, wakened by the sound of Granny grinding coffee and the smell of bacon frying. A stranger—Mother—sat in the kitchen. I guess she'd had a twinge of motherly instinct, or else Pap had told her she needed to be there to see me off on my first day at school. I rushed downstairs, gulped down some bacon, eggs, and a piece of blackened toast. Granny was a great cook, but always forgot to flip the toast in the old Toastmaster until smoke started boiling.

Granny made sure I was suitably dressed for this once-in-a-lifetime event: brown corduroy britches with suspenders, black and white wool shirt, and brown high top Buster Brown

shoes, all from the Sears & Roebuck catalog. I was the height of fashion, in Granny's eyes. But with that color combination, I'm quite sure I looked like an Amish clothesline. There were probably only two other times that could rival my spiffed up attire that day. The first was the day I came home from the hospital in a gown, cap, and booties handmade by Grandmother Amy. The other was the Sunday I was all decked out in white to be sprinkled by Dr. Harry Gardner, the Presbyterian minister for whom I was named. (My middle name Allen was in honor of my Uncle William Allen Spragg.)

Finally, I was ready to go. I grabbed my new cardboard pencil box—with eight Crayola crayons, a compass and a six inch rule—and my brown sack lunch and headed out the door with Pap to Oak Shade school a mile down the road. Mother went along to say hello to Ella (Ellie) King, my first teacher.

I proudly marched into the one room school that smelled of freshly oiled floors and chalk dust and surveyed the room in which I'd spend so many hours of my childhood. A pot-bellied coal stove stood in the middle of the room. Cards with the letters of the alphabet stretched across the top of the blackboard and a framed copy of the Declaration of Independence hung proudly on the wall. A world globe that sat on a little table beside Ellie's desk completed the teaching props.

I was the third generation of my family to attend this same little white frame schoolhouse. I shared this room with about 30 kids, ranging in age from six to sixteen, one teacher for all eight grades. Everyone knew each other. We all lived within a four-mile radius of the school. If you lived more than a mile from school, you got to ride the 20-passenger bus Ellie's husband Charley drove.

There were four of us in the first grade: Ronnie Hoge, Linda Henderson, Roland Orndoff, and me. Two years later, Freddie Stewart joined our class after failing the second grade twice in a row. We had assigned seats on one side of the room in desks with inkwells in the top, drawers beneath for books

and tablets, and hard drop-down seats that often still sported last year's gum.

Unlike today's schools, our day began with Ellie reading from the Bible, praying the Lord's Prayer together, and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. Kids today are forbidden to do what was an honor for us.

I'd just begun to get hungry when Ellie dismissed us for the 10:00 recess—barely in time to keep me from peeing in my new brown britches. I rushed down the path to the "two-holer," then came back to see what Granny had put in the brown sack for my first snack. There were two lady fingers and two cookies with marshmallow and coconut on top. I didn't like coconut too well—and still don't—but they tasted good to me that day. And besides, Freddie liked them.

At noon, I ate my bologna sandwich, a boiled egg and two more cookies. We then played ball, tag, and hide and seek. "Ellie" served as umpire, referee, and wiped our noses if we needed it. By now, I'd decided that four hours of school sure did beat twelve hours in the hayfield!

The afternoon went great. We had another recess and got our first tablet with the state of Pennsylvania on the front and a number two pencil. The upper classmen got a pen and Ellie filled their inkwells. Then she told grades four and under never to get into them. Yeah, right.

As the school day ended, I picked up my stuff and started the one-mile walk home. Granny met me at the door with a hug and sat me down to a glass of cold milk from the clay crock and some more of those marshmallow cookies with the coconut on top. (Where was Freddie when I really needed him?) We talked about my day, then Granny made me change clothes and do my chores before Pap got home from the sawmill and Bobby got home from high school. I was so excited to tell them about my first day of school, too, but that didn't happen. Pap had so many chores for me that day I was busy until bedtime. He said he'd hear about it later.

Oh, well. At least Granny took time to listen. She was the one I needed to share it with anyway, because she was my buddy.

School's Out

The setting: Oak Shade School
The cast: Pap, Uncle Delbert, and Charlie Mitchell

The mailman rode his horse by school one day when he heard a voice yelling, "Hey Brady, come down here." Brady stopped his horse and walked down around the coal house to find the teacher tied to the fence with a rope, and no students in sight. Brady could see the teacher wasn't injured—except for his pride—so he untied him and asked what happened. The teacher explained he'd been correcting three boys for misbehaving and planned to give them a good switching. When the boys resisted, the teacher said, "Now boys, I have the authority and power to do this."
One of the boys retorted, "you might have the authority, but you'll find we have the power."
Sure enough, they did have the power and used it vigilante style to tie him up and dismiss school. There were no further consequences for their mischief. The headmaster knew it would only complicate his life.
Thus began a school tradition. Every year the teacher would get one day of lock out (but not tied up) and the kids went home. We even did it to Ellie the four years I attended.
She was always a good sport.

Beans and Gas

Necessity is the mother of invention—or something.

I'll bet you think you already know what this chapter is about. But you're wrong. Read on.

Living on a farm, we ate what we raised, and plenty of it. Our garden always supplied enough food to last us—and some of the neighbors—through the cold snowy Pennsylvania winters.

Granny worked hard to plant our garden each spring, but I could never figure out why she planted so darn many beans, beets, and stuff I didn't care for, instead of more cantaloupes and strawberries. The simple answer was that she got a lot of mileage from green beans, and they were easy to can. But boy, come spring, was I sick of them!

One fall, some of the vegetables were ready to pick, including those infernal green beans. We went down to the garden with three bushel baskets to pick them. All the way, I silently prayed: *God, if it's your will to bring crop failure to us this year, please let it be in the green bean section of the garden!*

Well, God didn't heed my prayer as I'd hoped, and we ended up with three heaping bushels of those green pods. I could see now it was going to be one long winter with lots of

beans.

We carried the baskets of beans to the basement, because it would be a few days before Granny could can them. She needed to get canning supplies and then scald the jars at least twice, as she was a very meticulous lady. I thought it was a waste of time to do all that just for some of those green things that had little taste, except for bad.

Each time I went by those baskets in the basement that week, I thought how nice it would be if they spoiled in the waiting process. Now you and I both know this doesn't normally happen, unless they sit an extra long time or "something" gets on them.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to guess what happened next. I found a can of gasoline we used for the mower and "accidentally" spilled it on not just one, but *all three* bushels of beans.

When Granny went to get them for canning she noticed the aroma (spelled "stink"). Right away she questioned me, an innocent little eight-year-old boy. Needless to say, my story of accidentally spilling the gas didn't hold up in Granny's court, but luckily she gave me a chance to plead guilty and bargain for her not to tell Pap. The winter *was* long and cold, but not nearly as long as it would have been had we eaten all those green beans.

Knucks Down

The Olympic Committee should have named the game of marbles an Olympic sport. If it had, the world's champion surely would have come from Pine Bank.

Many of the good things I remember in life have been either replaced or lost as the years have passed. When was the last time you had someone pump your gas, check your oil and clean your windshield? Coke has taken on multiple definitions, a snort is no longer the sound Aunt Dale made when she laughed and gay doesn't mean happy.

Kids of today are entertained with Sega, Game Boy or some other computer game requiring cartridges costing up to fifty dollars each. Our entertainment was more simplified and did not require you to cut someone's head off to win. The game of marbles should have been placed in the Olympics and if it had been, the world's champion would have been from Pine Bank. If you were not good, you practiced until you were or lost your stash quickly.

Seems like only yesterday when Granny sat down at that old treadle sewing machine, took a piece of my old blue jeans and made me a sack with a draw string to keep my marbles in. We all had our private stock of those precious aggies and to give them up hurt but that was part of the game. Now, quiet the crowds; let the games begin.

The first move was to scratch out a circle in the dirt about

three feet in diameter and clear it of any stones or debris larger than a bug's ear. Each player would take some of their marbles and drop them from waist high into the circle, being very careful to remember their colors. All your marbles had to be within the circle so no funny stuff now in the way you dropped them. We would back off three paces and "ante up" with our shooter closest to the ring without going in to see who went first. The closest to the circle went first and the rest of the contestants followed in descending order.

The object of the game was to take your trusty shooter to the line and shoot to see how many of your competitor's marbles you could knock out of the circle. The skill of becoming first shooter was to get a crack at the pot before anyone else. After shooting, you collected your winnings and made room for number two. Your heart pounded as you watched him come to the line just knowing he had his eye on your shooter and to heck with the rest of those little ones in there. As he approached the line you notice him raising his forefinger just a little to add some leverage to his shot and you yelled, "***knucks down!***" to keep him honest. The game went on until all the marbles had been won. If you lost your shooter, that was tough. Better luck next time—and remember to keep your "knucks down."

The Old Red Rooster

Granny never did know what happened to that old red rooster, other than he disappeared. She was sure some dogs had gotten him, or he'd met up with a fox with an appetite for fresh foul.

When Uncle Bobby taught me how to hunt and fish, he also taught me the important things about gun safety and marksmanship. I learned to shoot with his Mossberg 22 caliber rifle. At age nine, though Pap and Granny would never allow me to have a gun, I got a Daisy Red Rider BB rifle for Christmas.

I thought I'd graduated to a big game hunter with this gun. I could hardly wait for spring to try it out. Finally spring came. Now I'd be able to shoot birds or anything else I could find, other than telephone wire insulators and used oil cans.

I had to promise never to point the BB gun at anyone or shoot anything I was not supposed to—although it already had done its share of damage through the winter on the insulators.

One day, I was in the front yard when I saw Granny's prize red rooster strutting from the chicken yard to the barn to get his daily ration of cracked corn. I knew he'd give me a good flopping on the way down if I caught him just right. Crouching behind the big ash tree, I took careful aim with my Daisy. Kerpoosh! One *dead* old rooster! It seemed like he flopped for an eternity until he collapsed in a heap of feath

ers. Since I was already afraid of him, no way was I going to pick him up until I was *sure* he was dead. Lucky for me, his final flopping was in high grass, well hidden from Granny.

After dark, I told Granny I had to go outside. I leaped over the fence, grabbed the old rooster, ran to the pasture, and *threw* him in a brush pile where he'd be out of sight and better yet, out of mind.

Somehow, revenge didn't feel as sweet as I thought it would. I felt badly about my mischief—though not the loss of the chicken—because I'd violated my uncle Bobby's teaching about guns and he was my role model. It also kinda hurt inside to betray Granny, my buddy.

Proverbs 24:6
For waging war you need guidance,
and for victory many advisers.

Bulls-eyes and Barlows

I was about in the fourth grade when I got my first watch and knife, and boy, did I think I was big stuff!

One of the centers of attraction in Minter Beall's store was the showcase by the wall filled with items that could not be displayed in the open.

Country folks are honest, but occasionally a stranger came through town, and you never knew what "those people from down around the river" were going to pick up if they had the chance. It never happened, because the moment a stranger came into the store, all conversations stopped and every eye was on them until they left.

Every time I was at the store, I went by that showcase and drooled at the Barlow pocketknives and the Bull's-eye pocket watches. The knives came in three colors: black, red, and white handles. They had two blades, a large one for peeling apples and whittling and a smaller one to cut bait and gut squirrels. If you happened to get them mixed up, it didn't matter. If you opened the big blade all the way and the little one halfway, you had the makings of a mumblety-peg game. Every year, I saved my money to purchase a new Barlow knife at the inflationary price of a buck and usually ended up either losing it or trading it at school.

Now, what good is a knife to a young lad if he does not

have a good pocket watch? The store keeper kept those Bulls-eye watches in that case too and they came with a black face and hands that glowed in the dark. I saved my money after buying a Barlow until I got enough to buy one of those "dollar watches" as the old-timers called them. If you were lucky, you could add fifty cents to the price of the watch and get a shiny chain, too. I was about in the fourth grade when I got my first watch and knife, and boy, did I think I was big stuff!

No longer would I need to use Freddie's knife to cut the hook out of a blue gill's mouth or ask the teacher what time it was because I had both. I guess my readers think these things were trivial but fifty years ago a Bulls-eyes watch was like a Rolex, and the Barlow is still made but sells for five ninety-five at the local Wal-Mart.

Modern days are here, but I refuse to block out the memories I have of that showcase by the wall.

My First Bicycle

1950

James 1:17
Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

By the age of nine or ten, I became interested in "bigger" toys. I yearned for a red Radio Flyer wagon with natural wood sideboards. And my, if I could just get my hands on a bicycle. A Christmas list hadn't shown much promise in the past. But that was before my paternal grandparents, Earnest and Amy Jane Clayton, came into the picture.

They were dear folks that I loved but could only visit on special occasions like birthdays and Christmas. They lived just a few miles away in Waynesburg. I've always felt that limited visits were a control issue on Pap Orndoff's part. But whatever the case, I enjoyed calling them (at 484-J, which I'll never forget) and visiting them at special times. Another reason for wanting to visit them was that they were the direct link to my father, who by now had remarried and was stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

That year a snowstorm started on Thanksgiving and stopped 48 inches later. Dad and his wife Audrey had come to my grandparents for the holiday and wanted me to come and visit. So, I spent Thanksgiving with them plus another

week, stranded by the storm. I couldn't have been happier!

I went back there for Christmas Eve. After dinner, we opened gifts. I was excited, like any kid. Dad always sent nice gifts for Christmas, but he never came himself.

We started with the usual: socks, gloves, underwear. All essentials, but not on the most-wanted list of a ten-year-old. Then I had to go to the spare bedroom and *stay there* until Grammy said I could come out. Fifteen minutes seemed like an hour! I was beginning to wonder if they'd all left, but then Grammy called, "Harry Allen, you can come out now."

Wow! I ran to the living room, and all I could see was chrome and red paint and ribbons. A new bike from Dad and that Radio Flyer with the wooden sideboards from my grandparents! I knew all the stories about Santa Claus, and somehow wanted to believe he really did know my yearnings that year.

While I got the two Christmas gifts I'd wished for, I realized much later that the greatest gift of all was a long, special time with my fathe, that Thanksgiving.

Tales From Pap Orndoff

Corn Cobs . . .Yeow!

Every Saturday, Pap and Uncle Delbert had to clean the horse stables and barn. This wasn't their favorite job, especially in the winter. The horses were inside every night and made quite a mess by week's end. But the worst part wasn't the horse dung, but watching where they stepped. There was no such a thing as indoor plumbing on the farm, so Pappy Charley used the stables. He kept his corncobs (Charmin if you will) just within reach on a shelf behind the horses.

Now, the boys wanted to somehow break Pappy Charley of this habit, but they knew better than to say anything to him. He would "whup" their butts for sassing.

One morning at breakfast they heard a blood curdling yell from the barn. They thought they knew why, but felt they should investigate, just to be sure. When they got to the barn they heard Pappy Charley yelling "I'm going to kill those @#$^&%$#@* boys!"

Peeking through a crack in the barn, they saw him in the creek, pants down, soaking in the cool water. It seems the boys had soaked Pappy's corncobs in turpentine and the heat was on, literally. Legend has it, this was where Johnny Cash got the idea for his song, "Ring of Fire."

Church

Granny was a God-fearing Methodist who never permitted "bad talk" in our home. And Heaven forbid if she heard of anyone "taking drink"!

In all my years I never heard Granny say one curse word or take the Lord's name in vain. Now, with Pap, it was a different story. Old Pap was quite the rascal and worked me like a dog. But when Sunday came, I got the day off, much to his chagrin.

My christianity officially began when Dr. Gardner sprinkled me as Presbyterian, but since I was an infant, I didn't remember that. I got most of my "Good Book teaching" from Granny and the ladies of Mt. Zion Methodist church. I remember going many Sundays to see only a handful attend. But God was there, and that was all that mattered. It was a typical country church: hardwood floors, high ceilings, no heat or air, an outhouse, and a piano that needed tuning.

Dorothy Williard was superintendent, teacher and song leader for all 25 of us (on a good Sunday). We didn't have a preacher, just Sunday School and singing. My, what sounds came from that group. Granny was the pianist and tried to play on the white keys and a few of the black, but most of her notes fell on the cracks in between. Bless her heart.

We'd sing a little while, then go to our classes. Cora Evans taught our class of two: Linda Henderson and me. Since I

wasn't a Bible scholar, I'd do my share of reading but let Linda answer most of the heavy theological questions, such as, "Who was Jesus?"

There was no bell or signal to end the class; we just winged it and broke when we got tired. Some of the sessions were quite long and dry, but I was in God's house and hearing His Word. And old Cora grew on me after a few Sundays.

That little old white frame church is still standing, but attendance probably has fallen even lower. In fact, I am not sure they have services anymore. But if I close my eyes, I can still hear Granny playing "In The Garden" or "The Old Rugged Cross" and the congregation warming the hilltop with their singing. Farther up the hill lay the graves of my ancestors who built the church and were responsible for my having a place to worship. What a great place to learn about our Creator.

The Beauty On The Bend

Standing on a hillside
Where the country road makes a bend
Is a sight to behold, for all that pass
It's the country church we all attend

Though it was once in shambles
All paint gone from its side
It was rebuilt by those who loved it
And became part of their family pride

The attendance began growing
As all the country folk pitched in
To restore this holy building
As it once was for their kin

Though many things had happened
That the elders never shared
It was still the country church
Loved by country folks who cared

It's a landmark of the country
Known both far and near
And has the well-known reputation
Of a most friendly atmosphere

Yes, it's just a little country church
Where we country folk attend
A building once in shambles
It's "Ole Bethel On The Bend"

Harry Allen Clayton **1971**

Bill Huffman's Revenge

Granny was way ahead of me. She called June Hoge to find her boys were in the same condition.

Only the spectacular colors of fall could surpass springtime in Pennsylvania. Maple trees come into bud about the same time that the May apples push their way to the surface. Fruit trees blossom non-stop. And that cussed *hay* started to grow again and complicate my life!

Bill Huffman owned the farm that joined ours at the top of the meadow. Now, Bill was a pretty nice old fellow, but had long hairs growing out his nose and ears that made him "a little less handsome." In fact, his appearance always scared me. He reminded me of the old fairytale troll who lived under a bridge, brooding over his territory. In this case, the objects of Bill's watch included two Early Harvest apple trees and a huge Black Heart cherry tree not far from our fence.

In spite of Granny's lecture to stay out of Bill's orchard, the Hoge boys and I couldn't resist going up the hill to check on Old Bill's apple crop and juicy cherries. Our strategy was to detour about a mile, so Granny—or even worse, Ole Mr. Bill wouldn't see us.

The juicy green apples were about the size of tennis balls. We'd remembered to hit the barn before our excursion to pack some of Pap's coarse salt in our pockets to sharpen the apples' tart bite. After we'd stuffed ourselves with apples, we headed

for the cherry tree for dessert. They were just getting ripe and so thick that you could sit in one spot and eat a gut-load before moving on to another limb. We packed our little bellies until they could hold no more and started back.

That evening I got the worst cramps I'd ever had. Every time I'd move, it felt like an auger was working in my stomach. I stood it about as long as I could before I headed for the throne. The "green apple lightfoots" had hit home. My continuous trips back and forth made Granny suspicious. I thought I had her convinced it was just a belly ache, but Granny was way ahead of me. She called June Hoge to find her boys were in the same condition. It wasn't hard to figure out. Granny won again. No more apple trees.

Growing Up
1951-1958

Pine Bank

It was just a little town where nobody shops
A general store and a barbershop
We had a picture show but it burned down
Now everybody calls it a hick town

From the song, ""Poor Folks"
by Bill Anderson

A hick town, maybe. But full of good memories. I can almost hear the rattle of floorboards that announced incoming traffic on the covered bridge at the edge of town. I was told that my great grandfather Orndoff hauled the materials with a horse and wagon, and the local town folk built the bridge. One Halloween, we hid in its rafters and dropped an old dummy made from feed sacks in front of cars. This prank cost us a couple of good butt chewings by drivers who came to a screeching halt and caught us before we could escape.

Two general stores functioned as gathering places for the locals. They carried everything from candy, cotton shirts, and tobacco to tin shears. Both proprietors, "Chat " Kerr and Minter Beall, dressed the same in gray cotton pants and shirts, with Union Made suspenders. The only difference was that Minter wore a size 36 britches and Chatty wore a 63.

Although the stores were miles apart in cleanliness and management style, only a small white frame house separated them. Most locals patronized both, but everyone had their

favorite. Since Minter's store housed the Pine Bank post office, he got the early morning trade. Everyone within walking distance came to get their mail, which was sorted and pigeonholed ready for distribution at exactly 8:30 each morning. The Knights of Pythias met in the lodge hall over Chat's store, drawing a crowd every Monday night. (For those unfamiliar with the Knights of Pythias and The Pythian Sisters, don't ask. We members don't tell—but it isn't KKK.)

Chat's more liberal and disorderly store was the center for colorful stories, but both stores distributed the news of the day, price of cattle, and the score of the last Pittsburgh Pirates' game. A huge round of Longhorn cheese covered with a towel or cheese cloth, was the snack of choice for the men who sat around exchanging stories in the evening. And each winter, two barrels of salt fish (herring) sold out as soon as the word got around of their arrival. The air was thick with smoke, and every other seat had a spittoon for Mail Pouch and Three Thistle users, most of whom had a decent aim.

We young boys rode our bikes to the general stores to hang around and watch the ongoing Cinch games. By the time we were old enough to join in, we had each mastered the game by observation and could hold our own.

Although almost everyone in Pine Bank was poor, our money did go a long way. Most important to kids, endless varieties of penny candy filled glass cases covered with the hand and nose prints of little shoppers agonizing over their choice. Soft drinks (pop) in large water coolers went for a dime for a large bottle and a nickel for a small. A dozen eggs packed in a brown sack sold for 15 cents. Bacon sliced to order was wrapped in white butcher paper neatly tied with string that came from a spool hanging from the ceiling. Amoco and Esso gasoline retailed for 32¢ a gallon. Canned goods we collected off the shelves were tallied up and "put on your bill." Few farmers paid cash, but rather satisfied their accounts once a month.

Lonnie Cole's barbershop was across the road from Chat's general store. This old shop spread all the stories of the biggest buck seen that year, where the fish were biting, and why Eisenhower was such a lousy president. When Lonnie raised his price for a haircut from 50¢ to $1 over the years, we thought inflation had taken over the country. I remember Lonnie (Butch) cutting my hair, then reaching into a granite wash pan on a gas hotplate to get an old, musty wash rag that he'd used on every customer for a week to clean me off.

The old blacksmith's shop in town wasn't used except for an occasional tire change, so it served as the boy's hangout to meet, talk, and have a smoke. Sometimes, Chat would run us out to protect his "community image." But in a night or two we'd be back, especially if one of us was lucky enough to have money to purchase a pack. Sometimes we had to defer to Buglar or Cutty Pipe tobacco and roll our own.

Every Thursday, Amity "Red" Marshall, the Coke man, made his weekly delivery. We always tried to watch for Red to get our free 6 oz. Coke. I declared that when I grew up I wanted to work for Coca-Cola and drink all the Coke I could hold. The rest is history. I started to work for Coke in 1960 and retired 25 years later. Thanks for the inspiration, Red.

The Pine Bank store has many good memories for me and to tell all the stories generated in that era would be a book in itself. Most would not interest to many readers, and some stories would require editing to protect the innocent. All of these people mentioned have since gone to be with their Maker. All that remains are the great memories for the privileged people like myself who lived in that era. Rest in Peace, dear ones.

Men Of Memories

Lidsey Henderson, Bill McDonald, George "Bub" Six, Charles "Jack" Daugherty, Norman "Granny" Roupe, Charley King, Jesse Carpenter, Glenn "Chippy" Snell, Basil Jones, George Burnfield, Arnold "Shavenhorse" King, Oliver Stewart, Burl Tennant, Edward Carpenter, Darwin Jones, Charley Carpenter, Johnny (Zinna) Carpenter, Blaine Roberts, Link Longsteth, Brady Huffman, Ralph

"Red" Huffman, Brant Smith, Minter E. Beall, Harry "Chat" Kerr, Harry King, Porter King, Joner Tennant, Charley "Squire" Meighen, Russell "Bunny" Tustin, Jim Hoy, John Kent, Jack Baker, Stanley Lapping, Glenn "Duffy" Morris, John Morris, Bob Evans, Harry Reed, Chester Reed, Morris Taylor, George Parson, Albert Cunningham, Dorsey Danes, Ingram Cummings, Glenn Metcalf, Raymond Ethelbert Lydle, Arthur Main, Junior Main, Everett Main, and Robert "Bobby" Orndoff.

Special Friends

DeWayne Smith, LeMoyne Smith, Charles Raymond Carpenter, Johnny "Spider" Carpenter, Kenny Six, Fred Stewart, Bob Carpenter, Billy King, Franky "Godfrey" Jones, Jack Mecalf, Marvin Daugherty, Wilbur Hoy, Lee Hoy, Lloyd Parson, "Doggie" Jones, Herb Lewis, and many more.

Walnut Bush School

Proverbs 6:30
Men do not despise a thief if he steals
to satisfy his hunger when he is starving.

There were two school districts in Jackson Township. They both named the schools after trees. The eastern part of the township had Willow Bank for the first four grades and Locust Spring for grades five through eight. Our district, the western half, had Oak Shade school where I went my first four years and Walnut Bush where I finished my elementary education.

Walnut Bush school had all the modern conveniences, like a two-holer, water from a pump, and a potbellied stove. The desks were larger, and we had special coatrooms, one for boys and the other for girls, as we merged with kids we did not even know.

By the time I went to Walnut Bush, my class was down to two: Linda Henderson and me. I hated Linda for always studying hard and getting her homework done. Our classes became much more difficult, with subjects like geography, science and health. To me, these were something one would study if they were going to assist Albert Einstein in his lab. I could never figure out why I had to know where Istanbul was, if I never planned to go there. And why should I care what the endocrine system did with the food once I got it to where it

needed to go? But I can see now why all these basics were important. Programmers had to have *something* to put on the Internet.

When I reached Walnut Bush, even my clothing graduated: britches with a belt, a ball cap, and leather boots. I discovered girls, but wasn't sure why my voice changed and little black hairs cropped out of my chin.

Baseball filled our spring and fall. Once a year we even went to play against Locust Spring school. In the winter, our school bus driver wouldn't let us take our sleds on the bus, so a piece of tin or coal shovel often doubled for a sled. Many times, I went down the hill behind the school and caught my britches on a twig, or tore a ninety-degree rip riding on a ragged piece of tin. Freddie was a master in steering the flat tins and could maneuver them to trip half the kids coming back up the hill.

I had a lot of fun at this old school. Despite not liking the new courses, I learned them and even got a C average. I read *The Tale Of Two Cities,* learned the "*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*"—but *gave up* trying to find those little foreign countries on the map. Looking back, those were the good days and the four most formative years of my life.

Look out high school, here we come!

The Old Sawmill

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25
A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

Pap Orndoff had been in the timber business as long as I could remember. As a little guy, one of my pleasures was going to the mill or woods with Pap and sharing the lunch Granny made for us. The mill equipment was extremely dangerous, so I spent most of my time in the lumberyard pretending to drive one of the logging trucks or the Caterpillar tractor. That's what Uncle Bob did, and I wanted to be just like him.

The diesel saw engine roared as Walter Brewer, the sawyer, pulled the throttle cable and pushed the carriage lever to cut through a big log. After the cut, the saw engine idled down and the edger rang as it removed the side bark from the board. Pap's sawmill was quite mechanized for its day and Pap made sure the equipment was in good shape, especially the wood stove in the office, where he spent most of his time.

I loved to play on the sawdust pile or build forts with the four-by-four caps used for cribbage in the coal mines. I'd pile them as high as I could reach, then get in to hide from Indians or outlaws. When I got tired, I'd go into Pap's office to get a ham sandwich or a piece of Granny's pie.

As the years went by, fort building and sawdust piles no longer held interest for me. I gained a place in the mill carrying the strips from the edger and placing them on a cart that ran on metal rails to the burn pile. Although I was doing the work of a man, I wasn't strong enough to dump the cart when it got full, so "Chippy" Snell or "Bub" Six would do it for me. Within two years, I graduated to operating the edger. Pap felt I was now big enough to realize the danger of the equipment. And after all, I was earning a whopping 50¢ an hour. Why shouldn't I take responsibility?

I loved that old sawmill despite the hard work. It wasn't long until I was big enough to go to the woods where Uncle Bob worked and learn to haul out logs with that Caterpillar I'd been wanting so long to run. Uncle Bob taught me how to maneuver through the smallest places and position that monster just right for the swamper to get the winch line around the logs to pull them out. I did this for a couple of years until I graduated again to the logging truck that hauled the logs to the sawmill.

Now, I thought I was cock of the walk, finally behind the wheel of that massive International, taking in huge loads of timber. Though I didn't fully appreciate the danger of the work, Bobby taught me all the safety rules. I was lucky to learn the timber business from the experts in the field. And I'll always be thankful for my mentors—especially my buddy, Bobby.

Learning to Hunt

Bobby was the hero of my life and taught me things a father might teach you—like baseball, fishing, and hunting.

Bobby was my uncle, but I was raised with him like a brother. I dreamed about the time when I'd be big enough to hunt with him, but I wasn't sure when—or even if—it would happen.

Bobby had a Mossberg 22 rifle with a four-power scope. I thought this obviously had to be the finest gun in the world, because my wise mentor had chosen it. When I was about seven, he'd let me hold the beauty and look through the scope. I'll never forget the time I pointed it at one of Pap's cows. Bobby harshly corrected me to never point it at anything I wouldn't kill. I was afraid that error in judgement would cost me a year or two more of waiting. But Bobby was not only a good teacher, he understood. After all, he was only nine years older than I was.

Groundhog hunting was a big sport around Pine Bank. If Bobby got a nice young one, Granny would dress and cook it for us. Granny's golden fried groundhog, fried potatoes with onion, and wilted lettuce were one of life's delicacies.

Then, in the spring of 1948, Bobby invited *me* along. My first groundhog hunt! We got the rifle and a box of Remington hollow points from the hall closet, then walked up the road

toward the Huffman place. I felt like I was walking next to John Wayne.

Bobby taught me to be quiet, walk slowly, and not make any quick moves. Groundhogs have a keen sense of sight and use sentries to guard their territory. We took up our position under a big maple tree where we could see the entire hillside and all the fresh holes they'd cleaned out that spring. It seemed like hours—then days. My hero never moved a muscle, except for the occasional side-glance at me with a little grin of pride.

All of a sudden, I felt a nudge to my arm. Bobby nodded slightly toward the first set of holes about forty yards away. There stood the prey, straight up, scanning from side to side. We didn't even twitch, and that old whistle pig crawled a few feet out to graze, convinced there was no danger. Bobby handed me the loaded rifle and whispered, "Remember how I taught you to place the scope on the target and then pull the trigger?"

I could hardly breathe from the excitement of my first hunt. I nodded yes, pulled the rifle up to my shoulder and found the groundhog in the scope. The ground hog now crawled slowly through the grass, hidden by the tall weeds. Bobby whispered, "I'll whistle. When he stands up, let him have it."

My buddy gave a shrill whistle and sure enough, up stood my pig. I released the safety, and a smile and nod from Bobby signaled "all clear." I let her go: KERPOW!

I was so excited I didn't know if I hit it or not until Bobby yelled, "You got 'em!" That was all I needed to hear. My first hunt with my friend, uncle, and brother all in one had helped move me one step closer to manhood.

In a few years, I began to hunt squirrels and rabbits. Then came the big one, deer hunting. This was the sport of sports in that country, but I wasn't sure I'd make the cut to join Bobby and his friends "Doggie" Jones, Herb Lewis, and other members of their close-knit fraternity. Finally, it was

Thanksgiving Day and the season always started the following Monday. As we sat around the massive dinner table after the meal, the conversation turned to deer hunting. My face flushed with excitement. Was there a chance? Could this be the year I'd be invited into that circle of marksmen?

As these questions flew through my mind, I hardly heard Bobby say, "Harry Allen, do you have your stuff ready to go?"

Amazed, I asked, "Are you sure?' His smile and nod of approval cinched the deal.

Granny jumped in with, "My, oh my. Now you boys be careful." Somehow, I felt this all had been rehearsed, but who cared? I was invited!

I could hardly sleep the rest of the weekend, dreaming about what this experience would be like. I got my gear ready a dozen times over the next three days and counted my shells at least twenty times, wondering if I'd have enough. I couldn't afford my own gun, so I'd use one of Pap's. It was almost as good as having my own, though, because Pap gave it to me with his blessing, which wasn't easy to obtain.

Sunday night I went to bed as soon as it was dark. At 4:00 AM, I pulled on three layers of clothes and headed to the breakfast table, barely able to move with all the bulk. Bobby smirked at me and said, "Have you got enough clothes on? It's ten above zero out there."

I had to say "Yes." There was no room for more clothes. Besides, that was all I had. We gulped down breakfast, got into Bobby's pickup and drove off to meet Doggie and the other guys at the Pine Bank store. I felt ten feet tall riding with Bobby in that old Chevy. I'd be content just to see a buck that day, let alone bag one.

At Chat's store, we gathered around the potbellied stove with other hunters to plan our strategy. Some were going to the Game Reserve, others to Arney Holler or Sutton Holler. Some even ventured to Town Run, which I thought was so big that no one but Indians had ever been there. Uncle Bob never said where he was going, but I figured he and Doggie already

knew.

The three of us got into the truck. Daylight was only a half-hour away and we needed to get to our spot, wherever that was. We started up the old gravel road as Doggie asked, "Are we going into the top or the bottom of the Merner Holler?"

Bobby answered, "It'll be easier walking for Harry if we go into the bottom."

I wanted to chime in, "Don't worry about me." But I knew where the Merner Holler was. The bottom sounded like a good plan to me.

We parked the truck, loaded our guns, and tried to find a good overlook of the whole territory. Then Bobby put me in the middle and we began our walk up through the woods. Newfallen snow from the previous night made it a little tough to walk, and three layers of long johns didn't help any either. But I'd never say one word. Deer hunters don't whine.

We had just crossed a ravine into a broom sage field when Bobby yelled, "Here he comes, Harry!"

I heard the brush crack above me, and I froze into position to be ready for whatever Bobby said was coming, which I presumed to be a trophy buck. The only other thing I heard sounded like a diesel engine, but turned out to be my heartbeat. Thump, thump, thump. I thought, *Be still my heart; this is embarrassing*. I was sure it was beating so loud the others could hear it. My ears rang, my cheeks flushed, and my knees began to knock like a drum. Something had to happen soon, before I wet my britches.

I knew where both of my buddies were: Doggie held up his gun, ready to shoot, and Uncle Bob stood about 3:00 o'clock from me. All three of us were in the safety zone (learned that from Uncle Bobby). Then I saw the buck, looking at me with his ears laid back and steam coming from his nostrils. He'd been aroused from his harem bed and wasn't a bit happy about it. As he looked for an escape route, my direction seemed the safest bet.

With a burst of adrenaline, he charged down the hill running like the wind, until he came about fifty yards in front of me. I pulled the Mannlicher up, took a deep breath, and CRACK! The hunt began.

Uncle Bob yelled, "You hit him!"

I really wanted to hear, "You got him!" But this was better than, "You missed him!"

We all ran to where the buck had been and saw a blood spot. A few feet further was more blood, brighter in color. This indicated a lung shot. We walked on through the thick timber. All of a sudden, there he was again, up and running. I took aim. CRACK! This time he fell to the ground. My heart was now out of control. And I wasn't sure if I had wet my pants or not. I was warm all over, not in just one spot.

My buddies joined me and we just stood there grinning at my trophy. He was a "four pointer," but looked like twelve to me. They both congratulated me then said, "OK, get the guts out and we'll drag him to the truck."

I knew I was in trouble now. I had a knife but not a clue as to how it and the guts were supposed to come together. Bobby said, "I'll show you, but you'll have to do the work because it's your deer."

My, that sounded good to me: "It's your deer."

I'll spare you all the gory details, other than that I'd "gut shot" him. That's not the prime entry point, especially after he's run hard and you have to field dress him in near zero weather. Yuck!

But I managed it. I'd gotten my first trophy buck. How could a hunter ever forget?

Bill & Maude

Psalm 91:11-12
For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

At an age when most boys enjoyed baseball and fishing, I was doing the work of a man. Every summer we had the hay harvest to contend with and very little modern equipment to do it. Our meadows were so steep we couldn't use a tractor, even if we had one.

What we did have was a team of big gray horses we called Bill and Maude. Pap had gotten them from Clarence Thomas as the settlement for an unpaid debt. They were pretty horses, if you didn't look old Bill straight in the face. (Bill had one blind eye.) It was usually my job to tend them, a chore I never minded, because they were well trained and a pleasure to work with. Whenever it was time for them to work, I went to the field with a bucket of grain and called them by name. Even though they knew what was in store, they'd docilely follow me to the stable to be harnessed.

I was barely big enough to stay in the metal seat of the old hay rake and guide the team at the same time. The hillsides were rough and rocky and the windrows of hay had to be perfectly straight, according to Pap. Little did I know that

was one of his own criteria, not a universal standard. Doing my very best to please him, I used extra caution to release the pedal and hit the trip lever at exactly the right moment to put the hay in perfect alignment. Bill and Maude were smart. But even though they knew *they* were in control, they still obeyed my commands. After we raked the hay into windrows, we'd either haul it to the stack or buck rake it into a stationary bailer.

One year, the hay was extra heavy, the flies were biting the horses, and the heat was getting to all of us as we made our rounds one after the other. Just as we approached a section near the pear orchard, Old Bill suddenly stopped, reared his head, and took a leap to the left, pulling Maude with him. " Whoa!" I shouted, and pulled the reins with all my strength. But instead of stopping, they took off at full gallop toward the barn. The reason was soon all too clear. We'd stumbled into a nest of yellow jackets, and they were following and stinging all three of us. Since I couldn't control the horses, my only thought was to hold on and pray that we'd somehow outrun the bees before we came to the narrow gate ahead. The rake barely fit through it.

The bees kept stinging and my fear worsened. All Bill and Maude could think about was outrunning those yellow striped devils and getting to safety in the barn. I held on tight, closed my eyes, prayed as best I could, and waited for the crash of metal hitting wood. That old rake would look like a pretzel if it wrapped around one of those gateposts, and I'd either be killed from the accident or by Pap for tearing up the rake.

Since I didn't feel a sudden jolt or hear the sound of scrap iron in process, I opened my eyes. Miraculously, we had cleared the gate and the bees had given up chasing us. Shaking, I got off the rake and walked up to pat Bill and Maude on the nose for protecting me. Thanks for the memories, you two. And who said three doesn't make a team?

The Old Huffman House

There were tales of a distant relative who'd hung himself in the basement. I imagined I heard him swinging from the rafters every time I went by.

The Huffman house just up the road from ours hadn't been lived in for years. There was a good gooseberry bush by the corner of the house, but I always made sure to harvest a belly full in the daylight. And when I went up the road to play with the Hoge boys, I never stayed past dark. I was *f-r-a-i-d* to go by the old lair!

The house was dark and musty, making it prime real estate for ghosts, in my mind. When Frances Huffman left the house and moved to Baltimore after her husband died, she never packed up her things. So, everything looked as if she'd just walked out—or *some*one still lived there. It was spooky.

Every year Frances came to check on things in her house and always dragged me along with her. I was thankful when she left, because I knew I would not have to go to the old forsaken shack for another year. (I truthfully was also glad to be done with her snoring and her rank body odor.)

One night as we stood in our front yard, Aunt Dixie yelled for Uncle Bob to come quickly. She saw a light up in the old house. That was all I needed to hear. I was already afraid of that place and now some headless horseman was in there with a flashlight!

Bobby and Pap both agreed that it must be someone stealing the antiques that Frances had left behind. They armed themselves and went to investigate, but I stayed behind to protect Granny, my old dog, Boots, and anything else that needed protecting. Dixie and I watched them from our yard. The whole time, I was thanking God for the opportunity He gave me to protect Granny.

Meanwhile, Pap and Bobby went up on the porch. At any minute, I expected to hear someone cry out from the pain of buckshot. But they returned saying they didn't see anyone in there, yet we still saw the light.

Later we learned that our front porch light was reflecting in a mirror that Frances had hung on the wall on her last visit. We saw the light every night after that, until they removed all the contents of the house. But I'll never forget the rush I got from the pounding in my brain and the twitching in my legs as I stood ready to run with the first sign of someone coming down that hill!

Becoming a Boy Scout

By the way, Pap, I think I *am* "going to amount to somehing." It must have been the Boy Scouts. (Or was it you and Granny?)

From the time I was big enough to thumb through a Sears catalog, I'd wanted to be a Boy Scout and wear that nifty uniform. Perhaps I was inspired by the few times I'd seen my dad in his Army uniform. But by the age of 11, I'd given up on the idea. The uniforms were expensive, not to mention the costs of camp and the special knife you needed—you know, the one with ten different attachments.

We were at a ball game in the town of Brave one evening when Arthur Patterson (or "Pat"), approached Pap Orndoff about my joining the Local Boy Scout Troop #194. Pat, the Scoutmaster, was a member of the Methodist Church that sponsored it and also a respectable man of the community. Pap told him he'd think about it. But I had a lot of work to do during the summer, and Pap wasn't sure I had time to be involved.

It really bothered—but didn't surprise—me that Pap had decided for me. He frequently told me, "You'll never amount to anything!" But I guess the Boy Scouts didn't provide the kind of training he felt I needed. This incident, however, was just one more thing that made me determined to be successful.

As the summer wore on, we'd discuss the possibility of my

becoming a scout from time to time. But the discussion always ended with, "Have you got the cows fed yet today?" or "Is the barn cleaned?"

I'd almost given up on my dream to become a Boy Scout until Mary Lou Fawley came by one day. She was a young lady that Pap and Granny had helped raise as foster parents. She was like an aunt to me, so I brought up the subject of Boy Scouts again over dinner. I knew she'd be on my side. No sooner had she voiced her opinion than Uncle Bob jumped in with his support. Pap was overpowered. The battle was won!

Pap took me to Brave the following Thursday night to take the oath and get everything I needed to become a full fledged Boy Scout, except the uniform. But Mary Lou came through again. She took me to the Army-Navy Surplus Store in Waynesburg and outfitted me from head to toe, including the knife with all the attachments.

I went to camp, earned a sash full of merit badges, and eventually advanced to the rank of Life Scout. Best of all, I finally got to do some things like a normal lad. Each year, summer camp was a huge issue because Pap's knee-jerk reflex was always, "It'll take a lot of money" or "You have too much work to do this summer." But I made it through. And Pap did the best he could.

Down, But Not Out

1952

Psalm 103:2-3
Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.

When a terrible flu epidemic hit our community in the winter of '52, it placed a heavy burden on the two old doctors who still made house calls. Dr. Steele, a man in his 80s, lived in Brave, a little community six miles from Pine Bank. Dr. Russell was in Rogersville, five miles further.

In March, I came down with what everyone believed to be the flu. I'd never had such pain! Granny called Dr. Steele to come to our house; I was far too ill to travel. The doctor finally arrived around ten o'clock that night, very exhausted from treating sick folks. He took my temperature and wiped the thermometer on his coattail before putting it away. Not surprisingly, he diagnosed my sickness as the flu and recommended a shot of penicillin. Then reaching into his black bag, he pulled out a needle that looked twelve inches long and about a quarter-inch thick. His shaky hand didn't do much to ease my fear of what was about to happen, but I was too sick to fight. The shaky marksman weaved the needle in the air, then zeroed in on his target—my butt.

When I was still sick a couple days later, Granny called old Doc again to come and see me. It was more of the same. After sterilizing the thermometer on his coattail, he nervously jabbed me with another shot of penicillin. But I was losing ground fast. So, Granny called my mother and Poppy (her husband) to come and help her. Pap Orndoff was already in the hospital, where I was about be.

Poppy bundled me up and took me to the Waynesburg Hospital where they examined me briefly, then rushed me to the OR to remove a ruptured appendix, which had progressed to peritonitis and gangrene. The operation was successful, but they kept me sedated for quite a while. When I finally woke up, my father and mother were standing beside my bed. Since this was the first time I'd seen them together, I actually thought I'd died and we were all in Heaven. Before surgery, the doctor told my mother they didn't expect me to live and advised her to call Sam (my dad) to fly home immediately.

But I fooled them all. Doctor Steele had saved my life with the penicillin. I made a quick recovery and only missed two more weeks of school. I had some story to tell my buddies, and a scar to prove it! And best of all, I saw Mother and Dad together for the first and only time in my life. That was worth the price I'd paid. (But I was disappointed that Freddie never asked to see my scar.)

Butchering Time

Butchering time was fun for everyone—except the animals—because the whole family worked together as a team.

Fall has always been my favorite time of the year, especially in the hills of Pine Bank. The morning air takes on a certain chill, the leaves turn from green to red and yellow and everyone is busy getting ready for the long winter ahead.

Long winters meant that a lot of food had to be stored, and most of ours came from the land. Granny had all the canning done except for the pears and apples. The potatoes were dug and stored in the basement with a crock of sauerkraut brewing. The only other thing needed for the long cold season was the meat.

Pap Orndoff always made sure we had plenty of pork and beef to last all winter. That took quite a bit, with two families of our own to feed plus my mother and her family. We always started fattening two or three hogs and a steer early in the fall for the traditional butchering time just before Thanksgiving.

I really enjoyed this day. We got up at dawn, and Pap started boiling the water in big black iron kettles. We put huge wooden platforms into place over the wash rack to scald and scrape the hogs, and set up a tripod of iron pipes to hang the beef. We always started with the hogs; they required more

time and were harder to process. Pap tested the water temperature carefully. If it got too hot, it would cook the flesh and make the hair hard to get off. Then he added a few wood ashes to the water to make hair removal easier.

We kept the hogs close to the processing area. When Bobby or one of the helping hands slaughtered a pig, we all helped drag it to the tables for scalding. I can still see the workman pouring hot water over the pig then scraping the hair one side at a time. Next, they completely submerged it in a large barrel of water to rinse. The hogs were scraped to perfection and then hung in trees to cool before quartering began. Pap cleaned the hog processing area while a couple of us moved to the tripod area, killed the steer, skinned and hung it high to cool for the day. These made a rather grotesque scene, but we never thought of that when eating a succulent ham, sausage, or roast beef.

On butchering day, Granny always fried fresh tenderloin for dinner. We delivered it to her kitchen as soon as we could remove it from the freshly killed hogs. To that she added mashed potatoes, gravy, biscuits, and everything else a hard working butchering hand would like.

But this was just the beginning of the butchering process. The hardest work was yet to come. We cut the steer into halves and took the beef to the Waynesburg locker plant where they cut and wrapped it, but we always processed the pork ourselves. Pap took the hams and shoulders of the hogs to a specially prepared area under the front porch. He'd cut some large maple planks at the sawmill to lay the meat on, then spread on a mixture of salt and sugar for the curing.

Granny supervised sausage making and rendering the lard. You can imagine what a hard taskmaster she was, with her meticulous habits. We would grind sausage all night and put it in big crocks, ready for canning or freezing. Granny always asked Pap to get her some of the very leanest meat to bake in one of her large crocks. Granny also made mincemeat and pickled pig shanks. If you've never witnessed someone

making mincemeat, I don't want to be the one to give you the gory details. But Granny's pickled pig shanks made for some of the best eating of the whole hog.

Finally, after the meat on the large planks under the porch had cured, Pap hung it from the ceiling with wire to store it for the winter. Nothing could beat the cutting of a cured ham for Christmas dinner.

Butchering time was fun for everyone—except the animals—because the whole family worked together as a team. Although we were all tired at the day's end, we talked about what a good day we'd had, and Granny reminded us how richly God had blessed us with food.

Tales from Pap Orndoff

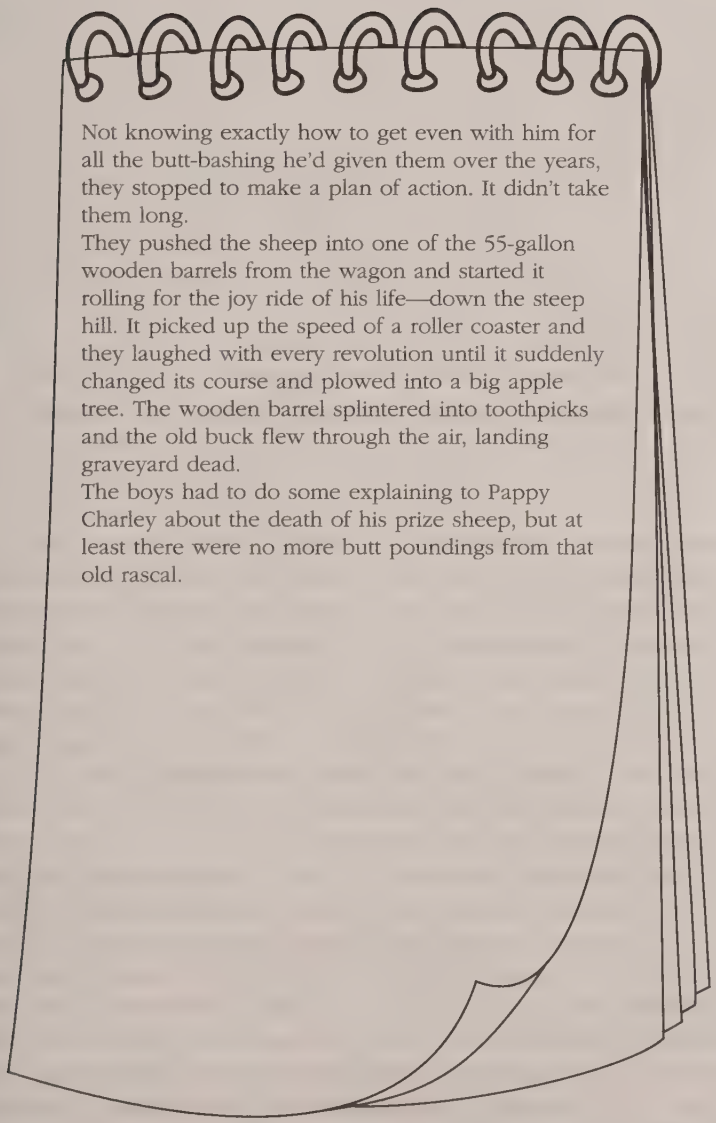
The Old Bucksheep

When Pap and Uncle Delbert were growing up they often had to run the farm while Pappy Charley was off teaming or constructing a derrick for a well. They were constantly harassed by one old buck sheep that really enjoyed catching them off guard, driving their butt up to about their shoulders, then doing an encore before they could get away. No matter how hard they watched for "Old Buck," he would someway slip it to 'em.

One day they were going up the hill to pick pears and knew if the old gentleman saw them they'd be in for a battle. So they harnessed up the horses and hitched them to a sled loaded with wooden barrels. Just as they started up the hill, here came the old bugger with his head down and snorting as if to say, "I'm going to pound your butt again for you." This time his plan was foiled. Not only did the horses protect them, but the sled sideboards kept him from getting to them.

All the way up the hill Old Buck persisted.

Then Uncle Delbert told Pap to throw a rope around his horns and snub him down to the sled. Mr. Buck was now <u>their</u> captive.



Not knowing exactly how to get even with him for all the butt-bashing he'd given them over the years, they stopped to make a plan of action. It didn't take them long.

They pushed the sheep into one of the 55-gallon wooden barrels from the wagon and started it rolling for the joy ride of his life—down the steep hill. It picked up the speed of a roller coaster and they laughed with every revolution until it suddenly changed its course and plowed into a big apple tree. The wooden barrel splintered into toothpicks and the old buck flew through the air, landing graveyard dead.

The boys had to do some explaining to Pappy Charley about the death of his prize sheep, but at least there were no more butt poundings from that old rascal.

Tales of Freddie

Proverbs 13:7
One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing;
another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth.

Freddie Stewart, my best friend, came from a family of seven kids. Freddie was about the fifth down. Oliver and Etta lived one mile up the road in a "holler." I found it a privilege to be raised with all the Stewart kids: Marigold, Peter, Paul, George, Rose, Freddie and Thelma. The boys were skilled hunters and great fishermen and the girls were pretty as pictures. Marigold (Chub) was mentally handicapped, but she was as skilled in hunting and rubbing snuff as the boys. I think going to the store in Pine Bank was about all the pleasure the Stewart kids got from life.

Freddie and I became real friends during my first grade of school at Oak Shade. I often shared my lunch with him. Many days, his parents didn't have enough money to buy anything for lunches; Granny somehow always knew to send extra. But Freddie and I not only shared my lunch, we shared a friendship that only two little guys that age could understand. If I was missing from school, Freddie wanted to know why, and vice-versa. We were inseparable through all eight grades of grade school—which took about ten years for Freddie—and two years of high school before Freddie finally gave up on

education.

During our first four years at Oak Shade, Freddie walked to school most of the time because he didn't like to ride the bus. I think the truth was he liked to be close to nature and riding the bus felt like confinement to him. When he came in late for class one morning, Ella asked where he'd been.

"Well Ellie, I was coming down the road and stopped to watch Lindsay's horses playing over in the bottom."

Ella knew he was lying and said, "Well Freddie, why don't you just come up front and show all of us how they were playing."

Freddie got up from his seat with an ornery grin on his face and walked to the front. He pulled the long bench out from the wall, began to whinny like a horse, and jumped back and forth over that bench till we were all in stitches laughing at him. Even Ella was laughing.

In the fall of 1951, we began attending Walnut Bush School, another one roomer with grades five to eight. My class had now dwindled to only two—Linda Henderson and myself—so graduating second in my class was not difficult. We had a lot of fun in that school. And Freddie provided much of the entertainment, even though he had failed again and was now a year behind me.

Our teacher, Luke Lemmon, was baldheaded, wore short sleeve shirts with a wide tie, and used a pocket protector filled with pens and pencils of every color. Luke was crippled on his left side and walked with a limp. One hand made a "U-Turn" at the wrist. But all the strength from his left side went to his right when it came to swinging "the board of education." And we got plenty of it.

"Lukie" cautioned us to stop playing "crack the whip" in the meadow before someone got hurt. If you've ever played this game, you know how much momentum builds to the one on the tail end, especially if Freddie was the cracker. One day, we thought we might be able to get away with one game, so we lined up ready to start when we saw Lukie coming toward

us with his crippled leg swinging, but gaining speed. We knew we were in trouble. Luke said, "Boys, I thought I told you to not be playing crack the whip."

Before anyone else had a chance Freddie said, "Well then, how about if we play whip the crack?" End of discussion and end of noon hour.

Lukie called us all into the schoolhouse, grabbed that two-foot persuader and said, "Freddie, come on up here. We'll now play your game of whip the crack."

Freddie went forward, but just as Lukie was about to make contact, Freddie raised his foot. Luke hit the steel plate on the bottom of Freddie's work shoes and splintered the board, but wore out what was left of it on Freddie's back side. We didn't dare laugh. That was our buddy getting punished.

Another time, we were in Simpson bottom fishing and having fun when Freddie tried to get a dip of snuff from Paul, his older brother. Paul finally tired of Freddie's pestering and said, "Fred, you see that big river sucker on that stringer that I just caught?"

Freddie answered "Yeah, I see it. What about it?"

Paul said, "You bite the head off of that fish, and I'll give you a rub of snuff."

No sooner said than Freddie grabbed the fish, looked it straight in the eye and with a loud ***cruuuunch***, bones and scales flew. Off came the head. Freddie spit it on the ground and said "Now, gimme that snuff box!"

After Freddie quit school we didn't see each other as much, but we were still best friends. He continued his antics when we hung out at the store each night. We all had a ton of fun, most of it at Freddie's expense.

After I married, Freddie remained friends with Betty Ruth and me. We took him places, invited him for meals and did anything we could to help him. In turn, he helped us, too. Freddie helped remodel our house, shoveled dirt, worked on my car, and anything else I had for him to do, at his own pace. Freddie might not come to work exactly when you wanted

him to, and when asked usually answered, "I cain't do it today, but maybe sometime tomorree."

When we grew older, we drank brew and listened to country music together. The more he drank, the louder Freddie sang. He loved Earnest Tubb and Hawkshaw Hawkins. Hank Williams came a close second.

Freddie got a job as a mechanic at the Greene Street Garage in Waynesburg. Milt Reed, the owner, had a Chevy that needed a new engine. He told Freddie "You get that engine all unbolted and disconnect the lines. When I go home for lunch, I'll bring back the chain blocks and we'll pull that engine."

When Milt returned from lunch he found the engine on the floor beside the car. He asked Freddie, "How did you get that engine out of that car?"

Freddie smiled and said, "I got up on the fenders and lifted it out...that's how." Freddie never knew his own strength.

But Freddie struggled all through life with his identity. After his mother died, he tried to take his own life, but failed. Now he's in a rest home in Waynesburg. I've not seen him for years but when I do, we'll relive the past 60 years of good memories. I am anxious to see him and wonder if he'll still be in his blue jeans and ragged shirt, with hair uncombed. Freddie wouldn't win a beauty contest, was poor and lacking education, but what he knew about friendship was second to none.

Trading Labor for Time

Ecclesiastes 3:1
There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven

The West Greene School District has one of the oddest holidays you've never heard of: the first day of deer season. It always caused so much absenteeism that they decided to declare it an official day off from school. This was a great perk, but if you took two days in succession, they were both counted unexcused. Three days resulted in suspension. We all enjoyed the first day, but it sure was tough coming back on Tuesday, especially if you hadn't had any luck on opening Monday.

I looked forward to a good season that year. I now had my own gun and transportation, but could have used a little more time to hunt. I tried coaxing Granny and Pap to write me a sick excuse for the first three days of that week, but nothing doing. In Granny's book, "Old Scratch" would get you for lying. Now, what was I going to do? My buddies and I had already planned a three-day hunt, but none of us had the grade point average to chance a suspension. I only had two choices, since Granny had already balked at the excuse idea. I could take the three days and push my luck or take just the opening day and cancel my plans. It was getting closer and closer to opening day and one of the biggest decisions of my

life.

I was feeding the cattle on Saturday morning when K.B. Evans, our school principal drove by on the way to feed his cattle at the adjoining farm. He stopped, as he always did, to make small talk. I asked him, "Mr. Evans, do you have to come over here every day to feed your cattle?"

"Yes, Harry Allen, they need fed, and someone has to do it."

My mind started running and before I even had a chance to think it through, I blurted out, "How about if I fed them for you? I could do it each evening."

I guess he thought I was looking for some pay, as he said, "Oh, it looks like you have enough of your own work and I wouldn't want to place a burden on you, especially with deer season coming on."

Well KB didn't know it, but there was method to my madness. I kicked my mouth into gear before my brain got fully engaged and said, "Mr. Evans, I'll feed those cattle the next month for nothing if you'll excuse me for three days from school to hunt deer." I had no more than said it when I thought, *I'll go to jail if he tells Granny and Pap of my bribe.*

He kind of smiled at me and said "You've got yourself a deal, if you don't tell anyone. Just bring me a slip from your grandmother saying you were ill."

When I shared the conversation with Granny, her reply was music to my ears. "Since KB. said it was OK, I'll do it."

Yes! I'd pulled it off! What a deal: Three whole days of hunting for only one short month of labor!

West Greene High School

In memory of some good friends in the class of '58:
Bill Worley was killed a year after we graduated.
Marcus Chaney, with whom I also attended elementary school, lost his life our sophomore year.
Dick Hill, an ace fighter pilot, was killed in maneuvers.
Terry Jones succumbed to cancer.
Sam Black died of heart failure.
Patsy Milliken drowned in a freak accident.

In my youth, I pined for two things: my first car and high school. West Greene High School was an old school. We had the traditional frilly freshman, silly sophomores, jumpy juniors, and superior seniors. I made it through all four years without crowding any of my fellow students for first place on the honor roll. Study hall was always my favorite subject, with woodshop being second.

There I learned how to inhale Camels without coughing and found the back seat of a classroom was not necessarily a permanent one. I got by with medium grades and missed very little school, at least that Granny and Pap knew of. We always managed to get two or three skip days a year for swimming. If we were lucky enough to have a car and a buck or two for gas, we'd go to Waynesburg to check out the city slickers. They were known as the Red Raiders, and we were the Pioneers. The two did not mix socially, academically, or on

the football field. They called us country bumpkins, but that didn't stop us from checking out their girls. The city girls didn't have much interest in good ole boys, so we stayed on our turf and left the Red Raiders alone, except for an occasional cruise across their campus just to aggravate them.

My freshman year at West Greene High was a hoot. I had all the essentials: pink shirts, peg legged pants, DA haircut with sideburns, and a cocky attitude. I played freshman football, serving as a tackling dummy most of the time because of my long lanky frame. So, I didn't go back my sophomore year. I decided there had to be another way to get to the football games. I tried out for the band. I played trumpet and then drums, but my musical skills were not nearly as good as my Casanova skills, so you can guess which I practiced most. In my junior year, I played a baritone solo in a concert. I was in and out of the band so many times I felt like a yo-yo, but it had some benefits.

I acquired a taste for acting and played the part of Dexter Franklin in "Meet Corliss Archer," our three-act freshman play. Ms. Huffman was the director. Since she had gone to school with my father, she gave me special treatment not only on the stage but also in her Latin and Algebra classes. My acting paid off. In the all-school play "Our Town," I got the role of the crusty old grandfather.

If I couldn't be a running back, the next best thing was performing in the school play. Teachers favored you, the school paper wrote about you, and the pretty girls liked to play opposite you—especially if there were snuggling scenes. I've often wished I'd pursued the acting field. I later found life is just one big play and the star role can be yours if you work for it.

I was lost in the shuffle my sophomore year. My mind was on courtship, but I didn't yet have a car and my Adam's apple stuck out farther than my feet. I'd see girls giggling as I passed them in the hall, but I wasn't sure if they were admiring me, or whispering about the way I looked. I've always felt the

sophomore year of high school should be eliminated until guys have time to mature beyond the squeaky voice and three-whisker stage of life. I am convinced the word sophomore means "dumb and dumber."

I did salvage some good memories from that second year, though. I worked on the yearbook, continued my acting, and even had some dates. My favorite moments were in Ms. Huffman's classes, the walk across town to woodworking shop, and going to Ivy Church's store at noon. That year the little burger shop opened in Rogersville. Although it took the better part of a dollar to get a burger, fries, and a Coke, Ivy's provided more variety than Granny's brown bag banquet. And you couldn't beat the social aspect. Our school was unique by today's standards. All the teachers had a special interest in the students and never treated them like numbers. This was partly due to the fact that most people in this small community were related or neighbors. We also prayed in the classrooms and publicly before football games. God went to school in those days, and they allowed Him in the classrooms.

My sophomore year was my last year of school with my buddy, Freddie, before he quit school forever. Freddie was still being Freddie. In Mr. Kennedy's health class, we studied various poisons and their antidotes in case of an emergency. Mr. Kennedy explained how they actually use snake venom to make snakebite serum, and other antidotes often contained a minute portion of the poison. He also described using milk or substances that cause vomiting.

After those illustrations, he asked what you'd do in case someone was bitten by a snake. The class answered, "Give them some snake bite serum."

"And what would you do if someone swallowed some rat poison?"

Freddie grinned and replied, "Feed 'em a rat." The class broke up laughing. Even Coach Kennedy chuckled.

When I finally became a junior, I began the best two years of my school life. I changed my hairstyle to a mature look and

gave up the pink shirts for a more dapper appearance. Poodle skirts and ponytails were all the rage for the girls, and the boys wore Levi's. This was the year for the Junior-Senior prom, class rings, and serious romance. Puppy love turned to a full-grown hound, and I made regular rounds to the kennel.

My popularity grew. I still didn't play much football, but I did high jump, and published the school paper and yearbook. My voice no longer sounded like a screech owl, and my three whiskers spread to the places I had dreamed they would. I had my driver's license and could get the car most Saturday nights if I worked like the devil all day. I was fortunate to have a date almost every weekend, but never got too serious with anyone.

The Waynesburg drive-in theater was the happening place then. No one cared what the main attraction was. All that really mattered was the social time. We normally got to the theater an hour before dark so we could go from car to car for the who's-with-who thing. Then after the movie, we always went to the Dairy Delight to either cruise around it or line our cars up behind it and talk. Most of the girls had to be home by midnight, and the ones who didn't weren't the type you took to the Dairy Delight anyway.

The idea was to not go steady. If you did, you were bound to the drive-in every weekend with the same girl. She'd wear your class ring around her neck on a chain or else put enough tape on it to look like a tennis ball on her finger. Not all Saturday nights were date nights. Every once in awhile, a bunch of the boys would get together to kick up our heels and drive to Cameron and check out their girls.

School dances (record hops) were also very popular. Most of the time, the girls danced with each other. The boys were either too shy to ask them or stood off in a corner and punched each other. When you did build up the courage to ask a girl to dance, you could bet one of your buddies would slip around and goose you. I hated it when that happened. I always believed the school calendar should have more dances

and socials than Algebra, Latin, and Physics.

Then the big one: I was a senior. I had a '53 Bellaire Chevy hardtop convertible with fender skirts, chrome mirrors, and "dog killer" spinner hubcaps. In nine months, school dances would end for me and the hallowed halls of West Greene High School would become only memories. Some of our classmates from previous years wouldn't join us to take that long walk down the aisle to get our diploma. Some had moved, some married, dropped out, and even death had taken its toll on a few.

Senior year was the time to get serious; college was just around the corner. Due to the poverty of the area, only a small percentage would get advanced education. It was a sad year in some ways. We realized we'd never see some of those friends again. Our class was small enough that you not only knew everyone, but spent several nights or weekend in their homes. Reality had now set in. We were on our way to becoming adults.

The hairstyle changed again, this time to a flat top with long sides and even longer sideburns. The pegged pants and all the trappings of being cool had been set aside. I decided to buckle down in class and concentrate on making something of myself, other than a class clown and flirt.

We still went to the drive-in and dances, but this year was different. Instead of standing in the corner acting dumb or waiting for the chance to goose our buddies, we now listened to words of the songs. As we danced to the Platters singing "My Prayer" our feet no longer got tangled, but we'd glide to the music and whisper to each other, "We'll miss this."

I was the Master of Ceremonies for the Senior Prom and banquet. For the first time in my four years, I actually got emotional when I gave the benediction. I realized I would never stand before my classmates again, and would read of teachers retiring or going to the other side. We signed each other's yearbooks for the last time, but the words inscribed were in the past tense not future. All those sweethearts we had were

now our friends and not our dates.

The year flew by. It seemed everyone dreaded to see graduation night come. We were privileged seniors, so we got out of school a week early. But most of us went back every day at lunch to socialize. Our sadness was compounded by the fact that our school would be closed and future students would attend a new one. We gathered for the assembly and tried to laugh and be happy to say, "It's over!" But actually, those words took on a different meaning for us.

We marched down the aisle side by side to "Pomp and Circumstance" in a packed auditorium with standing room only. The country folks dressed for the occasion with ladies in ankle-length dresses and men in wide ties. We used our programs as fans in the heat. I glanced to my left to see my Mother and Poppy sitting with Pap and Granny. I tried not to show it, but when Granny and I made eye contact, we both shed a tear.

I thought of all the times my dear sweet grandparents not only sacrificed but also encouraged me to work for this very moment. A few steps more and I would be at the crossroads of life. What I did from that point on would be my own responsibility.

In a flash, it happened: I heard "Harry Allen Clayton." It was my turn to cross the stage to get my diploma—the same stage where I'd been Dexter Franklin in the school play, played the baritone solo in a band concert. With one hand, I grasped my diploma and with the other, I shook Mr. Evan's hand. I was scared, but I'd made it. Although it hurt, I smiled as I crossed that stage to take the biggest step of my life so far.

Some of my classmates went to college; some became teachers; others preached the gospel, and some never left their roots. There were bankers, lawyers, and even politicians. Some made decisions in our career paths that we wouldn't make if given another chance. Whether my choices were right doesn't matter any more. I'm at peace with them. I'm quite sure my family wanted me to finish college, but all I wanted

was to prove that "I would amount to something—someday."

The Mystery of Oliver Stewart

Ecclesiastes 4:6
Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.

Our little community never had a lot of excitement, much less tragedy. We mourned the loss of neighbors, cared for the sick and elderly, but never had to deal with violent crime. Perhaps that was because our ancestors didn't tolerate violence and passed the trait down through the generations. Locked doors were the exception rather than the rule—except for the time an inmate broke out of the Moundsville Prison. Even then, there was little danger. Any convict in his right mind would never come to Pine Bank and chance the "party line" security system, or the scrutiny of a stranger in town.

It was a hot summer in the late fifties when the biggest news of the decade hit our valley. It was so bad, people refuse to talk about it, even to this day.

Oliver Stewart—Freddie's dad—hadn't been seen at Chat's store for several nights. Our community was so close-knit, the absence of a regular at the store quickly raised questions.

"Has anybody seen Ol in the last few days?"

"Nope. He must be sick," someone replied.

"Well, has anyone checked on him?'

"No, but we ought to," Chat asserted.

The talk went on for a few evenings until it sparked a search party of about ten of us to the "holler" to Oliver's house to look for him. Oliver now lived alone. His wife Etta had taken the kids and moved out. The two feet God had given him were his only transportation, and he scratched a meager living from the land. We hoped to find him under a shade tree, either resting from a hard day's labor in the cornfield, or overcome with the "Iron Cityitis." Oliver took libation regularly, but not to the extreme of keeping him away from the store for four or five nights.

As we entered Oliver's house, we saw there had been some violence. Broken beer bottles and overturned chairs suggested a fight. Oliver wasn't a violent man, so something had sparked this. Maybe it was a disgruntled poker player, or someone robbing him in the night. Anyone who knew Oliver would not rob him; he never had much money. And a stranger wouldn't walk a mile up the hollow to do it.

After searching the house, we branched out in all directions until we finally found a trace of him. Beside the barn was a boot track and a barefoot track together in the dirt. We continued searching the buildings and fields until Chat and I finally came upon old Oliver lying in the creek, wearing nothing but an undershirt and one boot. His body was half covered with water and it appeared that he died a tragic death. There were handfuls of mud where he'd tried to pull himself out of the creek bed but lost his grip. He had a large wound on his forehead that suggested he'd been struck with a blunt object. His poor old body had deteriorated, but at least he looked at peace.

"Someone go down and get Charley Meighen. We need him to be up here," one of the men said. Charley was our local Justice of the Peace, the only law enforcement officer we had.

"No, we don't want *him* up here!" Chat yelled "Just call Sam Weaver's funeral home to come and get him. Then call

Etta and the kids. That's all we need. Old Ol probably just had a crazy fit." End of conversation.

One of our neighbors had been murdered, but our instincts told us not to get the law involved, as if we'd guessed who his killer might be. We gave Oliver a nice funeral. He even looked okay in his new suit. We threw in some singing and praying and had a few good words said over him, all at the expense of the county. Oliver's obituary read "died of natural causes."

Everyone had an opinion of who killed Oliver, but none ever mentioned names publicly. Why was there no investigation? Why didn't we at least call the coroner? Why did Chat refuse to have Charley Meighen brought to the scene? The answer is that no one wanted to bring shame on our town.

Most of these folks are gone now, probably including the killer. There was no evidence, no motive, no weapon, and the case was closed when we threw the dirt on Oliver's grave. Chat's decision may not have been the right one, but since he was a key figure in the community, we all respected him and never discussed it.

Freddie certainly still has memories of his dad. And when I get to talk to him, maybe we'll discuss the incident, once we are sure no one is listening. We wouldn't want to bring more shame.

Becoming An Adult
1959-1972

Two Young Kids

March 28, 1959

"Do you, Harry Allen, take Betty Ruth to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

"I do," I answered.

"And do you, Betty Ruth, take Harry Allen to be your lawfully wedded husband?"

"I do," she replied.

We said our solemn vows loud enough for folks to hear us over Eve Carpenter's sniffling and Flora Henderson's trying to catch her breath. Two kids, not even old enough to vote, took an oath that day to live together as man and wife, until death took one of them away. Growing up together as best friends, we planned to make it last a lifetime.

Relatives packed the little country church. An event like this brought everyone out. Unwittingly, the preacher became the highlight of the wedding. Having bought a new suit for the occasion, he raised his arms to pray over us and the price tag fell from his sleeve. Since everyone had their heads bowed, we only learned the story later, captured on film!

A table in the church basement groaned with gifts—dish towels, potholders and toasters—as the ladies served up the traditional punch and cake.

Our attendants, Ronnie and Janet Rush, were such good friends they even honeymooned with us. Betty Ruth and I

spent our first night in Washington, Pennsylvania. Then Ronnie and Janet joined us for a foursome honeymoon to Lake Erie.

Being young and much in love, we didn't realize we were poor. All the money we had was in our pockets. There were no credit cards in those days, and since a checking account needed a minimum balance of $100, that was out, too. Our '53 Chevy served as transportation and whatever furniture we had someone gave us.

Since we couldn't afford a home, we did the traditional thing for Greene County. We lived with Pap and Granny until we could get on our feet. I worked for Pap Orndoff at the sawmill until I got my first big job working for the county. I helped build one of the big exhibit buildings at the fairgrounds, earning the grand sum of $1.25 per hour as a laborer. That was pretty good money to us. That fall I went to work for Williams Construction, making $2.10 an hour running a jackhammer.

There wasn't much work available in Greene Country during the winter. So, I drew unemployment while Betty Ruth got a job at the shirt factory. Best of all, we moved to our first home. Betty Ruth's mom and dad were transferred and offered us their home in Pine Bank—furnished. Had it not been for Ralph and Alta's generosity, we would have struggled much more than we did to make ends meet.

We survived the winter, enjoyed our home and lived our lives as any teenage couple would, in love.

Mark, Our First Born

December 28,1959-December 28,1959

Dear Son,
I know not why these things happen, but do know now it's for God's purpose and glory to have you there. Someday by God's grace and mercy on me, we'll unite again as father and son.

Love,

CHRISTMAS. Such a happy time of the year! Especially when it's your first year of marriage and you feel like you have the whole world by the tail. Betty and I decided to exchange gifts at home and then go Mother's and Poppy's. It was bitter cold and snowy, but that didn't bother us. *We* were going to be new parents in about five months.

Mother's gaily-decorated house smelled of fresh baked cookies. They were all so glad to see us and were as excited as we over the coming baby.

After dinner, Betty was feeling a little ill and had to lie down. But instead of getting better, she got worse. Mother felt instinctively that Betty needed a doctor. We were several miles from home and our doctor. Both Betty's and our child's life was in danger! I rushed her to the hospital and Dr. Fisher, a friend of Mother's, came out to give me the news.

"This doesn't look good, Mr. Clayton," he said gravely. "I believe your wife is going to lose this baby, but you have to make a decision."

I stood there in total shock and silence. I thought, *What kind of a decision could I make that would make any difference?*

In a Catholic hospital—and according to Catholic belief—it isn't unusual to save the life of the baby and consider the mother's life secondary.

My immediate reaction was, "We can have more babies, but not without the mother." He promised to do what he could for both but, knowing my decision, he would spare the mother's life first if he had to choose between the two.

I knew there was a God, but He wasn't first and foremost in my life. The situation would have been easier for me to handle if He had been. Why had I been forced to make a decision that really was God's to make?

The night wore on. Betty's situation worsened, and labor began. Minutes turned to hours. Each hour seemed a century long. Mother and Poppy stayed with me through the night and left early the next morning to be with their children.

Betty's pain and agony grew worse. We felt we were fighting a losing battle, knowing our baby was not old enough to survive outside the womb.

At about 8:00 AM, they took Betty Ruth to the delivery room. She'd not been there long when a nun came out to tell me we had a baby boy. He was still alive. "Would you like to come and stay with him for a short while?" she asked softly.

I knew even then what the future held for our dear child. I've never had such a feeling, as I entered the dimly lit nursery. There a tiny frail child fought for his life with the help of a crowd of doctors and nurses. They, too, knew he wouldn't make it. But they did their best to make him comfortable and ease my pain.

I walked to his bedside and touched his little hand, not yet fully developed. He moved a little, never uttered a sound, and slowly stopped breathing as he went home to be with God. I wept as I'd never wept before. The warm, comforting

sister held my hand and said, "May God bless you, young man. Don't worry. He's okay now."

I left the room and went to see Betty. I had to tell her our son had died. She hadn't seen him. She too was fighting for her life, after 18 hours of labor. I comforted Betty as best I could and then left her to rest while I began the dreaded task of calling family.

We buried Mark in a tiny white casket furnished by Weaver funeral home in Waynesburg. A couple of close family members and I were the only ones at his graveside service. Mark lies peacefully beside his cousin Penny in the family cemetery in Jollytown, Pennsylvania.

After these forty plus years, I still think of our son and the few moments I had with him before he died. Every Christmas especially brings back the memories of that cold wintry day in '59.

Ohio Bound

1960

Our families carried on like we were going to Africa. It was almost a cardinal sin to leave your family and move out of state, even if you were starving to death.

In the spring of 1960, with all we had been through the past winter, Betty and I were ready for greener pastures. Jobs in Greene County were scarce, and I didn't have money to go back to school. Our good friends, Ronnie and Janet, told us they were moving to Lima, Ohio. Ronnie had gotten a job with B&O Railroad and invited us to go with them to look for employment.

Pine Bank wasn't the end of the world, but you could see it from there. Lima was an industrial town. I felt there'd be no problem getting a job. And if lucky, it might even be year-round.

Well, ever since I was a little guy, I'd had a passion to work for Coca-Cola. Guess what was across the street from Ron and Janet's apartment? I strutted over and asked to see the manager, who happened to be from Pennsylvania originally. We hit it off great. When he asked me if I had any experience I answered, "No, but I'm willing to learn." I told him I hadn't been married long and needed a job in a new frontier. He must have liked what I said. He gave me an application and

told me to come see him the next day.

I wrestled with my pillow all night, anxiety mounting. Could I possibly get a steady job? And better yet, get away from Greene County and all the relatives?

Morning came at last. I went across the street to see Mr. Joe Miller again and find out about my career potential. I knew I had scored well when Joe met me, smiling. He asked, "Are you still interested in a job?"

"Sure am," I replied.

"Well, get up to the supply room for some uniforms. You can start tomorrow."

I beamed with pride as I walked back to the apartment carrying those white pin striped uniforms, starched so stiff they would stand alone and rub you in places you did not need to be rubbed. That was the beginning of a 25 year career with Coca-Cola and a whole new life for Betty Ruth and me.

We rented a furnished apartment and moved our personal things to Lima, despite the fact that our families told us we would starve to death there. I "humbly" retorted that if we were going to starve, at least it was going to be where they couldn't interfere with it.

I'll never forget my first pay envelope from Coke, $71.16 a week—in cash! It didn't get any better than this, folks: a steady job, our own apartment, a cocker spaniel named "Missy," and a '54 Ford convertible with a hole in the top. Although we still didn't have a checking account or a credit card, we had each other and love. That was all that mattered.

Our Second Son Is Born

May 5, 1961

I could hardly wait until morning to tell my buddies at work about the blessed event and give them a cigar! Thank you God for this child. And thank you, Betty, for what you had to go through to get him.

History was made as Allen Shepherd became the first man to be launched into space. On that same day, another guy made history. Welcome, Michael Dane Clayton!

It was the day for Betty Ruth's final checkup. The doctor took one look and said, "Check her into the hospital. It's time to get on with it." Mom and Dad Huffman were there already; we'd been sure it wouldn't be long.

Our baby was ready, too, but couldn't get off the launch pad. So, the doctor advised Cesarean section. We weren't sure what that meant, but he said it was the safer way. After losing Mark, we didn't want to take any chances.

In those days, there were no sonograms. We didn't know if it was a boy or girl and really didn't care. We just wanted a healthy baby and a safe mom.

By now, it was evening. I was scared to death as they wheeled Betty off to birth our baby. We'd only been married two years, but our entire courtship and life together flashed through my mind as I watched my wife go through the large

swinging doors to the operating room.

I wasn't a committed Christian in those days, but I did know how to talk to God in my own way. I asked Him to please bring our baby safely into this world, to protect my wife, and—if He had any time left over—help me a little bit, too. I really needed it. Minutes seemed like hours, as the hands on that old wall clock barely moved. Alta lit up one cigarette off the end of another. Finally, the doctor appeared and said, "Mr. Clayton, you have a baby boy. They're both doing fine."

Tears fill my eyes even as I write, just as they did at that unforgettable moment. We'd made it—all of us! The doctor continued, "You can see him in a few minutes after they clean him up."

How did he get dirty? I wondered.

With the grandparents along, I practically floated to the nursery to see *our son*. As we stood waiting by the nursery window, we could hear him having a Clayton fit. Finally, the curtains opened. A nurse held up this little red infant for us to see. Quite honestly, my first thoughts were something like the Bill Cosby line: "Put him back. He's not done yet." Mike's little head was pointed for a few days from his battle in the birth canal. Even with a pointed head, he was the most beautiful child I'd ever seen. *He was our son.*

I'll never forget Grandma Alta's tender first words: "My God, he's a wrinkled little thing, isn't he?" The tears flowed down our cheeks as we welcomed Mike into the world. When I finally could tear myself away from the nursery window, I went to Betty's bedside, kissed her, and said "Honey, you had a boy."

She looked at me through groggy eyes and said, "I feel like I had a mule." With that, I knew she was OK.

What a day that was! What a fantastic, unforgettable, never-to-be-duplicated day!

God's Little Acre

Deuteronomy 28:3-6
You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. . .You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

I peddled enough Coke to float a battleship and it paid off. I was promoted to a route supervisor. But even though my salary was now a whopping $110 per week, we had a new baby, furniture payments, and wanted to buy a home. This does not cipher!

Our upstairs apartment on Kibby Street was nice but quickly shrinking, with an added tenant in the family. Realistically, we knew we couldn't buy a home on my salary, but started looking, nonetheless. Apartment life was getting old. The farm boy in me needed space.

Then we found a little white frame house on Elida Road, on almost an acre of ground. Boy, what I would give for an acre, after being cooped up in those flats! But the realtor popped my bubble when he told me the price: $9,800! He might as well have said $9,800,000. How in the world would I ever pay off $9,800 when I couldn't even come up with $1,500 for the down payment?

I gritted my teeth. It sure looked like we were "flat bound" for another few years. The house was perfect—a big yard for

Mike, a garden, and even a billboard at the edge of the property that paid $100 a year rent. But our monthly payments would be more than $160, rather than $125 for rent. There was no way.

The realtor knew he'd hooked us and patiently reeled us in: They'd widen the road in a few years; our property value would double and by then, we'd be ready for a bigger house, cash in hand. *What's the difference if the value quadrupled, if we don't have the money to get the house now?* I thought.

Though we struggled with the decision, we finally gave in. I was expecting a raise in a few months, so we could handle the extra house payment. Ralph and Alta (Mom and Dad Huffman) loaned us the money for the down payment, saying we could pay them back when I got my raise.

A home for us to raise our family. A back yard for our son. A garage I converted to a gun shop business to help ends meet. A garden. Space for our Labrador retriever, Sir Onyx Von Sable, to run. If there was such a place as God's Little Acre, I am sure this house was the model for it.

In a few short years, we sold it for $18,500 and moved back to Pennsylvania to work for Coca-Cola in Morgantown, West Virginia.

Thanks, Mom and Dad Huffman, for giving us our start. May you rest in peace in your new home in Heaven.

Harry's Gun Shop

Ecclesiastes 2:10
My heart took delight in all my work,
and this was the reward for all my labor.

Not having enough to do (joke), I decided to start a sideline business for retail gun sales and service. I applied for my license, converted our garage to a storefront, hung a sign (compliments of Coca-Cola), and Harry's Gun Shop was born. The business was slow to start, but word of mouth and the sign soon got things moving. The repair side of the business wasn't as profitable as gun refinishing, so I invested in equipment for a quality bluing process that took our business to a higher level. The revenue was great and steadily increased.

Betty Ruth helped in the business as much as she could during the day and joined me on weekends in the shop or at gun shows. The weekends were hectic, with guys coming and going. Some of them just came and forgot to leave. My shop became a favorite place to loaf for lots of "bull shooters."

We made many new friends, and folks came from miles around to bring their guns to us. We had a finishing process that no one could match. But the business occupied so much of my time it was almost impossible to have a life with my family unless they joined me in the shop. I'd give an old piece of wood and some sandpaper to Mike and he'd sit on the floor

beside me for hours working on it. He was just beginning to talk, and when you asked him what his daddy did, he'd say, "Harreeegunchop," all in one word. (He also picked up a few words from some of my customers that were more appropriate at a ball game than in church.)

Although our business grew rapidly, it was becoming too much with my full time job, yet didn't pay enough to do full time and lose my benefits. I was also losing my helper. Betty was pregnant again. Her tummy got in the way when she refinished the guns, and no one else could do it as well as she.

So, we decided to close our business and sold it to another dealer in Kenton, Ohio. This gave us more quality time as a family and the income wasn't as important because I'd gotten a better paying job with Seyfert Food Company.

I still have many memories of Harry's Gun Shop, especially "Old Maggie," my Winchester 300 Magnum that I built from scratch. I still use it to hunt, some forty years later. I also treasure all the good friends I met and the wholesome life we enjoyed at the time. If the gun laws weren't as stringent as they are today, I'd even consider doing this again when I retire. But I'd have to change the name from Harry's Gun Shop to Pappy's Gun Shop.

Dixie Joins the Family

June 24, 1963

An Angel came to live with us! To this day, our "Dixie Doodle" still exudes the same delightful charm she turned on her daddy that morning.

It was a long cold winter, and Betty hadn't been feeling well. A touch of flu, we both thought when I got sick, too. But the flu makes you sick all day long, not just the mornings. Was I having sympathy pains?

Betty Ruth headed to the doctor. As we'd begun to suspect, we'd soon hear the pitter-patter of little feet on our floor again. The good Lord knew Mike needed a playmate, and we certainly welcomed another child. But we both were very scared. What if Betty couldn't carry another child to term?

Betty worked hard, but cautiously, as she carried this little gift of God. Her activities helping me in the business required a much faster pace than she'd had with Mike, but her pregnancy went quite smoothly once we both got over morning sickness. Believe me, I'm glad I never had a baby if it makes you that sick!

We were able to schedule the day and time we wanted the baby to be born, since we knew it would be by C-section. We chose June 24. Somehow, that sounded like the perfect day to have a baby. Betty Ruth went in the evening of June 23, and Grandma Alta and I arrived at the hospital at the crack of

dawn the next day. We were both afraid we'd miss something. Finally, they took Betty Ruth to the delivery room, and I had that same special time talking to God just as I had with Mike. God must have heard my prayers. Soon the doc appeared: "Mr. Clayton, you have a beautiful little daughter."

I'd never heard truer words spoken. She was the most beautiful baby I'd ever seen! (Sorry, Mike.) She had the features of a Charmin model. Her brown hair and her pink skin were so soft you felt as if you were touching God's perfect handiwork. And she greeted us with a soft smile rather than a Clayton fit.

Dixie Lynn Clayton—named for her Aunt Dixie Orndoff—had joined our family. God had blessed us with another miracle and protected her mother in the process.

To this day, "Dixie Doodle" dazzles her daddy. Her beautiful features haven't diminished one speck in the thirty-seven years we've known her. Thank you God, for this precious daughter, although I sometimes feel I wasn't worthy of your blessing. Thanks, too, for the mother who worked so hard to birth and raise her.

The Binkleys

Proverbs 17 :17
A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity.

I'm sure that TV's Walton family was patterned after our best friends, the Binkleys. There were no grandparents living in their home, but everything else fits: a house full of kids and everyone bulging with love.

Like all of us, the Binkley's didn't have many earthly possessions or a lot of money. Clayt (Clayton) worked as a machinist at the Lima Locomotive Works. Tiny (Clara) was homemaker, seamstress, gardener, animal caregiver, and a *wonderful* mother. Their children were stair-stepped from Kathleen, down to Mike, Jimmy, Danny, and Rick. The whole family worked hard, even the children, but they never considered themselves poor. They had all the love and fun they could wish for.

The Binkley's idea of a great weekend was loading everything up and heading for the lake on Friday night, and coming back just in time to get the kids to bed on Sunday. We had the privilege of going with them and soon got our own camping equipment and boat to be part of the gang. We named our boat *The Katzsass*. (If you say it quickly, you'll pronounce it correctly.)

Although "Harreeegunchop" kept us from going to the

lake as often as the Binkleys did, it was a treat when we went. No matter what the weather, we'd bundle up for the cold and wrap the babies in blankets. Once I even sat up all night to keep the lantern going in our tent so the family wouldn't freeze. But we still had fun.

Sometimes as many as six couples headed in caravan for the lake. The Binkleys always hosted the main campfire, and we each took our offerings to add to the pot. And we always topped off our meal with marshmallows and some of Tiny's lemon pie.

Dawn came early on those weekends. Either an old crow calling for his mate, or the whirring of an outboard motor on a boat headed out for first catch served as our alarms. We fished in the morning, water-skied and swam with the kids in the afternoon, headed to the community campfire for dinner, then fished again by lantern light until the wee hours of morning. Our catch usually provided not only our camp fare, but also some weekday meals.

One big event was soft-shell turtle hunting. Clayt was the expert. He knew both the waters and the habits of the creatures. He'd made big hooks at work to feel for turtles along the banks. When he found one, he'd pull it out and flop it into the boat. The turtles' mouths begged to take a chunk out of a finger or a leg. Once we had a good catch, we'd put them in a burlap sack and take them home to be fattened from swill that Clayt kept for his pigs. On the first weekend too cloudy to camp, we'd gather at the Binkley's to have a feast of fried turtle. After eating, the men gathered out behind the barn to shoot clay pigeons, with the women cheering us on.

Clayt and Tiny were the kind of role models you usually only read about. All of their kids were well-mannered. They taught their children their Catholic faith, but didn't place their beliefs above ours or anyone else's. They not only loved their children, but also loved each other in ways that were so obvious we all learned from them.

Our friendship with the Binkley's continued through the

years, even after we relocated to Pennsylvania. I'll never forget the fun we had together and their positive influence on my life. They'd be in their late seventies now and most likely are great-grandparents. I'd give anything to know where they are and how their children are. If I were to guess, they're spending their spare time fishing, and still caring for others—the thing they did the best.

Moving in Reverse

Proverbs 15:27
A greedy man brings trouble to his family but he who hates bribes will live.

This part of my pilgrimage is hard to tell. I hope you'll value my honesty more than any cynicism or hurt that creeps into the story.

During our years in Ohio, we made several trips back to Pine Bank. It was a nine-hour trip with no interstate highways except route 40—and it was under construction most of the time. So admittedly, our visits were widely spaced.

The grandparents counted the days until we arrived (and probably counted those remaining after we got there). But I dreaded when the time came to say goodbye. Each time, it was harder. You could count on Pap Orndoff to ask "When are youse coming back here to live?"

"I'll probably be dead and gone before you come back again," Granny added.

Leaving was like a funeral. And their deep yearnings didn't fail to affect us. So, we explored the possibility of trying one more time to find a way to avoid starvation in Pine Bank.

I figured it didn't do any good to call on God for help. When I'd tried that once He answered, "Don't ask me. I had to get out of there, too."

Okay, so I exaggerate. But in so many ways, this country

was stricken. The economy hadn't improved any, but I was able to find a job in management with The Coca~Cola Bottling Company in Morgantown, West Virginia.

So, we said goodbye to our house and God's little acre in Ohio where we'd been so happy, and headed "home" to be with family again. Raising your kids in the same community where you grew up sounds like a good thing. But believe me, you can never "go back home."

Morgantown was 35 miles from home. It took a full hour of driving to get there and up to four hours getting home. My job was okay, but the family-owned operation was full of animosity and greed. I ended up spending much time fighting politics without any possibility for advancement. But we were back with family!

I'll admit that our kids certainly were happy living in the country and closer to their grandparents. At first we rented a little home in Pine Bank that was very cozy and CLOSE (did I say close?) to all of our relatives. But the only fellowship we had was with family. All old friends had migrated to Ohio and were smart enough to stay.

Eventually, we managed to buy another home in Pine Bank for $2,500, which included two acres. This "fixer-upper" turned into a multi-thousand dollar project. On a salary of $130 per week, our remodeling project was a financial disaster that brought more problems in our marriage.

Now, I don't expect anyone to feel sorry for me. I was old enough to make my own decisions. But unfortunately, most of them were wrong. I fell in with the wrong crowd at work and my personal life was in shambles.

You see, I wasn't concerned with my spirit or soul, only the flesh. I centered life on myself, withdrew from my entire family, and switched on autopilot toward self-destruction. (Did I mention this was hard to write?)

Our unity as man and wife was broken. I left my wife of thirteen years and two children, aged eleven and nine, vowing *never* to return to that area again. That began an even

darker season in my life, with many other heartaches. But none could compare to walking away from my family.

Finally, I came to my senses. In May of 1981, in a little church in Plantation Florida, I invited Jesus Christ into my life. I walked down the aisle a consummate sinner and returned free of the burdens I'd carried so long. Matthew 17:20 suddenly came alive to me: *Because you have so little faith I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to the mountain, "Move from here to there and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."*

For years I'd struggled with the hurt and sorrow I'd brought upon my family. But after becoming a Christian, I asked their forgiveness. Graciously, they all forgave me. Faith in Jesus moved the mountain I'd built through my own sin. He'd taken me through the dark valley to the other side. I've walked with Christ ever since—nineteen years and counting.

Can I offer some wisdom I learned the hard way? If you struggle with some of the same issues I've shared in this chapter, turn to Jesus. He's in the forgiving business. And the only payment He requires is our love.

An Image In Life

My son, you are growing older with each passing day
Just think some day you'll be a man and go your separate way

But until you reach that stage in life there's one thing I would like you to do
Is a live a straight and careful life for your past will follow you

Think back of all the troubled times that I have caused for you
Don't follow in my footsteps son, for they won't see you through

Most Dads are supposed to be an example for their son
But so happens in my life I was not that one

I chose that rough and crooked road not the smooth and straightest one
I thought that I was going right but I was wrong my son

If only then I could have seen what wrongful things I'd done
I wouldn't be a lonely man I'd be an image for my son

It's hard for a man to tell his son he failed him in the past
For memories like I gave you for me will ever last

Son, now I see too late in life the road I should have trod
Try not to make the same mistakes but put your trust in God

Don't' fill up your life my son with wrongful deeds and sin
Prepare yourself now to be a man like you daddy should have been

My son you have all it takes or ever could be had
To grow up to be a man and not an image of your dad

By the time I reach half way in life your life will have just begun
By that time by the Grace Of God, I will be an image for my son

As we both travel down life's road accepting good and bad
Chose the proper way my son be an example for your dad

I wrote this poem to my son Mike at a time when I was struggling with some issues. 1972

The Lost Years
1972-1978

The Lost Years

1972 to 1978

Wisdom, compassion and courage: these are three universally recognized moral qualities of a man. When a man understands the nature and use of these moral qualities, he will then understand how to put in order his personal conduct and character.

Confucius

We all have certain times in our lives we'd like to forget. For me, those times extended into five long years. I can only account for them as:

- ⇨ **I'm to Blame for them.**
- ⇨ **I created them.**
- ⇨ **Some enjoyed them.**
- ⇨ **Most suffered from them.**
- ⇨ **Satan endorsed them.**
- ⇨ **But God forgave them.**

Go West, Young Man
(Until You Run Out of Options)
1973

Proverbs 29:23
A man's pride brings him low but a man of lowly spirit gains honor.

I decided to put as many miles as possible between myself and the family I left, so I relocated to the Midwest and served two years as manager of a small Coke distribution center in Lawrence, Kansas. From there, I was promoted to distribution manager for the Coca~Cola Bottling Company of Kansas City.

As my responsibilities grew, I became involved in some major projects with the parent company in Atlanta. I helped develop the distribution system now used by bottling companies throughout the world. This equipment design plus combining telemarketing with advance sales won me my "15 minutes of fame." The system proved to be so efficient it reduced the sales force by at least 25%, and increased the sales per hour by more than 75%. The bottlers loved me, but the unions hated me. I was costing them jobs.

The old ways of operation were gone. But I was sad to realize I'd developed something that eliminated the way I started with the company. I'd loved the old route sales days, meeting people and earning their trust. But progress ruled,

and industry eagerly moved to new methods without concern for human cost.

I traveled to bottling operations all over the U.S., demonstrating the new system, but my company was reluctant to let me continue. I was a prime candidate for some competitor to hire, doing the same thing for their operation.

Then I received a call from the president of a Coca~Cola bottling company who wanted me to be part of their management team. The bottling company was on the verge of bankruptcy from high operating costs and aggressive competition. But Carl Navarre, well known for rebuilding bottling companies from shambles to success, had recently purchased the franchise. I accepted the challenge and moved to St. Louis, Missouri. I was young and daring and had nothing to lose. I'd already lost everything a few years earlier.

The career ladder became easier to climb, but I stepped on many fingers as I passed. Did this bother me? No! That's what it took to succeed! With the challenge in St. Louis, I needed to gain the confidence of not only the management team, but also the Teamsters Union. I'll admit I wasn't one to work well with a union.

The "honeymoon" first year went smoothly. We didn't make any major changes with labor and had gained about ten points of market share by deep discounting and service, something new to that market. We promoted larger, returnable packages. The new system I'd designed really paid off. We could serve large stores in half the time and carry twice the load. The union cooperated, but our selling expense accelerated, and we weren't earning a profit yet.

In the fall of '76, it was time to negotiate a new union contract. Former contracts had given labor a stranglehold on the business. So, management decided to make a stand. The union could see they were losing ground and had to dig in so the "dream team" couldn't wear them down.

The workers made good money, but could they afford a strike? Could the company afford a strike and lose its momen

tum? Both sides were restless. The normal process of "give and take" was failing.

We started negotiations far apart; it took a week to talk sensibly, much less negotiate. The business agent for the Teamsters had nothing to lose by taking his work force to the street. It wouldn't affect *his* salary. My job was to maintain service to the customer, regardless of working conditions. I was determined to do that. I could see a strike looming, so I arranged to transport raw materials with a management team and service our accounts with non-union members.

It was a setup for a bloodbath. You couldn't mess with the Teamsters Union. But neither could you mess with an old country boy from Pine Bank, who had more brawn than brains.

The negotiations broke down and the union voted to strike. Monday morning greetings were no longer, "Hi boss, how are you doing?"

Instead, grim looking men carried signs that read "Clayton is a scab!" and "Don't trust 'em—they lie!"

Trust me, the strike was bad. Management carried clubs to protect themselves and even used them. But somehow, it felt like hitting your brother, until the union "hired" some picketers. These were thugs who went from place to place, qualified only for one thing: *violence*.

The strike continued for five long weeks. Both sides were weary, but management didn't have the same luxury of calling reinforcements. The strike ended with a contract that was full of holes. But at least the nights of sleeping on the dispatch floor and escorting a convoy of syrup trucks through bricks and clubs were over.

Camaraderie between union and management was never the same. We immediately began attacking the competition to regain what we'd lost, but without the team spirit we had before. The business agent for the union surrendered his position and came to work for the company management team. That gives you some idea of the corruption in the union hier

archy and how they used their power to their own advantage. Management offered the job and paid him off under the table to bring closure to the dispute. The Teamsters would have dumped him for caving in.

I learned a lot. For one thing, I found the grass is greener on the other side of the fence because the septic tank is there. I also learned that you can't trust everyone in high places. Many got there by using others as stepping stones. And the hardest thing about being successful is finding someone who is happy for you.

Money motivated me to move to St. Louis, and it took a couple of years before things began to change. God was allowing me to live through the consequences of my bad choices. He also let me wander alone until I was ready to walk with Him.

Starting Over
1978-1985

Gentlemen, Start Your Engines

May 1978

We met the next morning to catch the bus for the races and—Would you believe?—our seats were next to each other. It was hot and noisy. By now, my mind wasn't on the races, but on the lady from Southaven with the cute accent.

Jimmy Carter was president, Mickey Mouse turned 50, gasoline was 63¢ a gallon, and "Grease" was the musical of the day. But wait, there's more. In 1978, Al Unser Sr. won the Indy 500, and a Chevy Corvette was the pace car. Now who cares about trivia? And what does all this have to do with me? Well, for starters, I was there.

Some of my buddies talked me into going to the race in Indianapolis, although it didn't exactly sound like the fun thing to do. Why would I want to ride 400 miles in a motor home with a bunch of guys who liked to party, to sit in the hot sun eight hours and watch a race until my head hurt from engine noise? But I went anyway—*thankfully*!

I won't burden you with the details of our trip. But before we drove into Indianapolis, John Nau, the driver, said "Hey fellas, we have to swing by the airport and pick up a couple of ladies who need a ride."

Oh, great. I didn't care if Jane Fonda and Raquel Welch

were waiting. I just wanted to get to the hotel, away from these guys, to catch a few winks. After all, I had a big race to attend the next day. Now, here we go into the airport—disrupting our card game—to pick up a couple of ladies.

As they boarded the bus, John introduced us to Nancy and Linda, from Memphis. Didn't they even have last names? At least, I didn't catch them. But one of them was kinda cute, so what the heck. A couple more riders couldn't hurt anything. When we checked into the hotel, they went their way and we went ours. *So much for the cute one, with the red top and khaki britches,* I thought. Fat chance I would ever see her again in a crowd of a half million people.

After I caught a few winks, I headed poolside. We were invited to the local Coca~Cola bottler's home that evening for a cook out, and I sure didn't want to miss the bus for that outing. It meant free steak and trimmings, plus maybe a little fun. I flaked out on a towel by the pool and heard someone say. "Hi again." It was the same sweet little lady—but now in a bathing suit—coming to get some sun.

I thought I'd never see her again, but there she was, talking with me. This lady was not the usual type you met poolside. She had a cute accent and a smile that would give Jane or Raquel—either one—a run for their money. As we continued to talk, I thought to myself, *Oh Lordy, how can I keep this conversation going, especially when I have to leave to go with those guys to that stupid old cookout?*" Good steaks and "fun" were rapidly losing their appeal the more Nancy Wood and I talked.

Nancy had come to Indy with her friend Linda to get a breather from some of the trauma in her personal life. Divorced with two daughters, aged four and eleven, we had a lot in common. It was obvious she was scared to death, not knowing anyone. I tried to be caring and understanding.. It had been a long time since I'd met someone I could just talk to with no ulterior motives. I knew she was a lady.

Later John Nau came by, saying we'd leave for the cook

out in about an hour and he asked Nancy to join us. Coincidentally, her friend Linda knew the hosts, and they'd invited them to the same party. I wanted to look over my head and see if there was angel above me. This was too good to be true!

Nancy and I mixed with the crowd awhile, then our paths crossed again as we found a place next to the campfire amidst all the noise and celebration. What a beautiful lady she was. I sensed that she was uncomfortable in that environment. Her role of working mother hadn't afforded her opportunity for much recreation.

As the evening wore on, we decided to meet at the coffee shop when we got back to the hotel. Besides being divorced and having two children each, we found we both liked black coffee. Finally, it was time to call it a day. As we walked from the coffee shop back to the hotel to say a nervous goodnight, I thought, *Oh God, what is happening to me? And* WHY?

We met the next morning to catch the bus for the races and—would you believe?—our seats were next to each other. It was hot and noisy. By now, my mind wasn't on the races, but on the lady from Southaven with the cute accent. Something happened to me that day in a crowd of a half million people. I was wildly attracted to a lady I had known only two days.

Nancy and Linda agreed to ride to St. Louis with us in the motor home and fly to Memphis from there. With a goodbye kiss at the St. Louis airport, I told Nancy, "I'll give you a call sometime." And I returned home to an empty apartment with a full heart. What a lady she was!

All in the Family

Summer of 1978

It seemed rather strange for me to be courting at the age of 38, much less having my son with me to chaperone!

That year, Mike came to spend the summer with me in St. Louis. What a pleasure it was to have him. He got a job there and earned enough money to keep "Old Thunder" his Chevy Nova on the road.

We did a lot of things together during the week, but my weekends concentrated on courting the lady from Southaven. Ms. Nancy and I agreed our courtship would include our children, so we'd meet halfway most weekends and get two hotel rooms—Mike and I in one, Nancy, Jennifer, and Wendy in another. We'd picnic, go to theme parks, playgrounds, or just enjoy talking. I've often wished Dixie could have been there to share that summer, but she had other things to do and joined us later.

On one trip, my foot was too heavy and a deputy sheriff nabbed me for speeding. I knew I was in trouble when he told me to follow him to the next little town to appear before the Justice of the Peace. When I got out of the car to go inside Mike said, "See ya, Dad. I hope you come back."

This proved to be the understatement of the year. I also hoped I'd have enough money left to continue the trip. It was

a Kangaroo court, right down to "Bubba the Justice" waiting for us, feet propped up on his desk. The High Sheriff said I must pay the fine in cash only, but somehow, I already knew that. Angrily, I paid a fine, without getting a receipt. Then Bubba Justice said, "Hey big guy, you see those pine cones laying out there under that tree?"

Without a smile, I growled, "Yeah, I see 'em. What about 'em?"

Both Bubba and Deputy Dog laughed. "Better git ya one of 'em and slip it up under your gas pedal." I was mad enough to spit, but knew the fine for that would probably be $150 and I never would see Ms. Nancy. So, I left well enough alone and moved on to Cape Girardeau, where Nancy and the girls waited.

A few times that summer, the girls made the trip all the way to St. Louis for the weekend. On one visit, I went into the ladies bedroom to let them know breakfast was ready. I leaned to kiss my soon-to-be bride good morning when little Jennifer's head popped up like a turtle out of a shell. She said, "You waked my mamma up again." Oh God, the sweet memories you've given me.

Wendy and Dixie were a little more reserved with their comments about our romance. Dixie was a teenager and Wendy a "tween," so they had their own ideas of courtship, and it didn't include picnics or soft music.

I'm convinced now that the only people who gain from a divorce are the lawyers. Many times, the children become pawns of their parents, or worse, find no place with either parent. We included the children in our plans as much as we could. We wanted them to feel the love of a family once again, instead of the stigma of a single parent household. The summer of '78 was the preview to a great feature story.

You Needed Me

August 20,1978

Lord, I'm so thankful you brought Nancy and the girls into my life. Thank you for providing a light for the darkness I was walking in. You gave me someone to love that You knew would love me back. I'm unworthy of your blessings, Lord, and humbled that You took a special interest in someone like me, who had taken so much in life for granted. Just as You revealed in your son Jesus Christ, I too found that love can be pure.

"You Needed Me." It was a popular song recorded by Anne Murray in 1978. It suited Nancy's and my sentiments exactly, so we played it at our wedding, August 20. It was early on a Sunday morning, and we had to be out of the church by 8:30, before the first service began.

In a ceremony attended only by close friends and relatives, two people—accompanied by four children—solemnly stood before God and united in marriage. The altar was a stump in the Wilderness Log Chapel of Silver Dollar City. The Baptist minister also worked as a maintenance man for the park. The musicians played an old-fashioned pump organ and a piano that needed tuning ten years prior.

It was a beautiful sight to see our children standing to greet us as we came down the aisle of the old church, lit only by oil lamps and candles. The altar bore a simple floral arrangement. Nothing fancy, just love to be shared.

After we repeated our vows, each of our children were to light a candle, with Nancy and me lighting the final one in the center to symbolize our union. Mike lit his candle first, then Dixie Lynn, and Wendy. But Jennifer couldn't reach hers, so Mike walked over and gently lifted the little blonde angel to light her candle. It was his first act as "big brother." As Nancy and I took each other's hand and lit the remaining candle, I held back tears of happiness.

The ceremony was over. It was only 8:00 AM, but six lives had changed forever. We headed to the Holiday Inn for a breakfast reception with our friends. As I stood on the balcony ready to go into the hotel, Wendy came up and asked, "Now, can I call you Dad?"

I knelt to her level, gave her a hug, and said, "Honey, I'd be honored."

As the reception ended, J.J. (Nancy's father) provided the highlight of the occasion by asking everyone if they wanted a watermelon to take home. He had a trunk full.

Three to One

First year of Marriage

I love her more now than I did then, but not as much as I will tomorrow.

In the fall of '78, Mike and Dixie returned to Pennsylvania to be with their mother and attend school. And I had a new family—three ladies and me.

We moved into our new home on Pioneer Way in south St. Louis and began the business of getting to know each other.

Wendy made friends easily, with her radiant personality and conversational skills. Jennifer's best friend was Lori, the little girl next door. One day they were playing down in our game room when Jennifer said in her little southern accent, "Lori, come ova here and smail of the back of this chair."

Little Lori had no idea what she smelled and said, "What do you mean?"

Jennifer replied with a startled look "That is my old daddy's shaving lotion." Although Lori hadn't a clue, we knew the leather chair had absorbed the smell of Jennifer's birth father.

Another time the girls were planning a visit to be with their father. Jennifer in excitement told Lori, "I'm going to visit my daddy."

Lori retorted, "No, *that's* your daddy," pointing to me.

"No!" exclaimed Jennifer "That's my *dad*. I'm going to visit my *daddy*."

Her puzzled little friend asked, "How can you have two daddies?"

Jennifer explained, "Well, my mommy lived with my daddy, then she met my dad, and just took the one she liked the best." Out of the mouths of babes…

Things were very interesting, to say the least, for the first six months. I was busy building my career and marriage was a new thing for me again. I'd become very independent, with no day-to-day sharing of my life. I'd also uprooted Nancy and her girls from their comfort zone in Southaven and moved them to foreign territory, so to speak. The winters in St. Louis were dreary and cold and Nancy didn't know anyone yet, through no fault of her own. She is a very friendly person.

Nancy's homesickness and my lack of sharing soon tarnished the newness of our marriage. We tried to keep our suffering from the children. They'd been through enough. (As if *we* hadn't?) But we began to wonder what we'd gotten into. Would this work, or were we destined for heartache and loneliness again?

I'd started "playing at church" with Nancy and the girls, but kept the same friends and habits from the past. We came perilously close to walking away. But after a brief leave of absence, we decided to work at resolving our problems.

We sold the house on Pioneer Drive, moved to another area of St. Louis, and started again. The three girls made new friends, and I improved my temper and some of my habits as we struggled to make our marriage vows reality.

God's been merciful to us. Through His blessings, we saved our marriage, raised our children, and, 22 years later, I'm more in love than ever with that little lady with the cute accent.

HAPPINESS IS BEING MARRIED TO YOUR BEST FRIEND

Another Move

(Oh No!)

If I was going to succeed with the company, I'd have to play along, even at the expense of my health and well-being.

Our home on Bitterfield Drive in St. Louis grew cozier and contained more love than ever before. Our big yard was great for the kids. We even had a pet squirrel named Sammy who ate peanuts from a bucket we hung in a tree.

We had a small garden, an asparagus patch, marigolds, and plenty of grass to keep me busy. I started landscaping the lawn and ordered some horse manure to fertilize my rose bushes. One day I came home to find Jennifer and her little friend, Zach just stirring away and having a ball making mud pies in the pile of "dookey." To this day, I love to tell that story and she still gets embarrassed. She and Zach thought it was a dirt pile.

The kids made friends, we found a local church, and we were adjusting. Then I was told I needed to move to the parent office—in Florida. I was caught in a political move. The

general manager was making room for one of his retired army friends. My only choices were to move to Florida or find another job. I made my decision to move based on my career, without seriously considering its impact on the whole family.

St. Louis was not exactly the garden spot of the world, but it was a heck of a lot closer to family than Florida. Homes in Florida weren't cheap, and in the Carter years mortgage rates ran 16%. We finally found a house in Plantation, not too far from the beach. I promised the girls a home with a pool, since I was moving them again. This luxury not only added to the cost of the home, but maintenance costs were horrendous.

We'd not even moved into our home yet and were sitting around the hotel pool when it hit us. The president of the Florida company promised that we'd never have to move again. (Spelled, S-T-U-C-K.) We were already uneasy about our surroundings. My commitment to better my career suddenly smelled of social and financial disaster.

In our new neighborhood, we were in the religious minority. In some ways, that proved to be worse than a color barrier. Everyone was out to make a buck, even if it meant fleecing their neighbor or relatives to do it. Happily, we found a little Baptist church and made some of the best friends we'd ever known. But most of them were transients and like us, felt they were stuck there.

Stress mounted at my job. Travel consumed 75% of my time. I was implementing new distribution systems, fighting unions, and stepping on "little" people. Home office politics were cutthroat. If I was going to succeed with the company, I'd have to play along even at the expense of my health and well-being.

We survived five long years, making our house payments—Nancy was a good money manager—and gaining many friends. As I reflect on our time in Florida, most of it was good. I was able to adopt Wendy and Kelley (Jennifer), I became a Christian, and was baptized. Yes, most was good, until October 24, 1984.

The Pivot Point

Saved

Proverbs 3:5-6
Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.

South Florida had its drawbacks, but some good came of it. Our marriage grew stronger, our kids adjusted well. I guess we did as good as could be expected, being so far from family. Now we couldn't run to J.J. and Nana's for a weekend, but had to limit our visits to major holidays.

Nancy and the girls started attending the First Baptist Church of Plantation while I stayed home and cut the grass. One Sunday Nan came home from service to join me on the patio where I was drinking a beer. She said, "Honey, you should go with us next Sunday. They're considering a new preacher, Bill Amos. I think you'd like him."

Now, why on earth did she think I'd be taken with some preacher named Bill Amos? I wouldn't make any commitment. That would take off the armor I'd worn around me all these years. Religion wasn't manly in my mind. Even socializing with those who were religious was a sign of weakness. Admittedly, I wasn't comfortable in the body of Christ, but I didn't know why. Religious folks always seemed happy and hugged one another. Was it a front, or did they actually feel

differently?

Nancy had never pressured me to go to church. From time to time, however, she invited me to go with them. So I relented and agreed to go hear the trial sermon this Amos guy was to preach.

People were shaking my hand as soon as I entered , thanking me for coming, hugging one another. *Oh no, what had I gotten into this time?* But I did enjoy the singing. According to the program, it was time for Amos to take the pulpit. (You can tell I was really into that church stuff.)

He preached, I listened. For the first time in many years, someone had gotten into my head. I even found myself squeezing Nancy's hand as we bowed to pray.

When the service ended, everyone told Amos it was a great sermon as they filed past him to the door. I didn't know if it was a good sermon or not, but I did know it held my attention. I found myself telling him, "Preacher, I'll keep coming as long as you do." We had a deal.

One night Bill Amos sat with me on my patio, smoking his pipe and sharing the gospel. He told me how Jesus Christ died for my sins. If I simply acknowledged Him as my Lord and savior, all could be forgiven. This was what I needed to hear. How could I go wrong with such an offer? I prayed right then to invite Jesus into my life. May 17, 1981 I was baptized, with my wife and children as witnesses.

The mystery had been solved. Now I *knew* why Christians seemed happy and hugged each other. I felt a sense of joy and peace come over me as never before. If you haven't had this experience yourself, I suggest you do it now. Not only will it bring you happiness and a new life, it will also guarantee that we'll enjoy eternity together. We owe that to each other—especially since we're friends.

Blessed Twice More

May 2, 1983

Isaiah 8:18
Here am I, and the children the LORD has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the LORD Almighty, who dwells on Mount Zion.

I became a father again at 43! No, you didn't miss a crucial chapter. And besides, we'd have taken second place to Abraham and Sarah. But look at what Webster has to say on the subject: *adopt* – to take into one's own family by legal process and raise as one's own child. Sounds like *fatherhood* to me.

For five years, I'd watched Wendy and Jennifer struggle with having a different last name from Nancy and me. Kids can be cruel and sometimes made snide remarks about their name being "Wood" rather than "Clayton".

Normally, I'd have said something such as, "Don't pay any attention to them." But I couldn't take this lightly. These daughters meant too much to me to see them hurt by something that could be remedied.

I discussed adopting them with Nancy one evening and we felt it best to ask the girls' opinions, rather than making the decision ourselves. So, we gathered the family one evening without giving the girls any idea of what we wanted to discuss. We explained what adoption meant and asked if this was

something they wanted. They looked at each other and grinned. They thought it'd be great!

I was excited beyond explanation! I'd just received affirmation from both the girls and their mother that they trusted me. Becoming a father to two more children was a big step for me, but one I was proud to take. I prayed for the strength and wisdom to live up to their expectations.

The next step was getting their birth father's consent to relinquish his legal right to fatherhood of these precious girls. It was a difficult proposition to make, but I assured him it was for the sake of the girls. I loved them and wanted to be their dad, but he'd always retain the title of Daddy as their birth father. He listened, and then said, "Let me think about it for a couple of weeks."

Exactly 14 days later, I called him for his decision. He agreed. As soon as I hung up, I phoned our friend and attorney, Randy Buck. The legal process of adoption began the next morning.

Within a month, the legal documents were ready for the girls' father to sign and Randy set a court date with Judge Grossman in Fort Lauderdale, Florida for May 2, 1983.

We dressed in our finest and met Randy at the judge's office. Randy presented the legal case, and the judge read me the following charge (paraphrased):

"Mr. Clayton, do you understand the responsibility of fatherhood and accept it on behalf of these two girls?"

"I do" I replied, nervously.

He continued, "Fatherhood is a great responsibility and by granting this permission, I expect you to live up to its standards."

"I will do it," I vowed.

Then he said, "Mr. Clayton, I present you with your new daughters, Wendy and Kelley Clayton."

A court of law, granting *me* the right to fatherhood, even placed my name on their Tennessee birth certificates. I'm glad our courts have that power, but I prefer to think the honor

really came from the Almighty. I hugged them along with their mother as I wept tears of joy. Randy hugged and congratulated us, wiping his tears as well.

When I turned to shake hands with Judge Grossman, I found him even wiping his eyes! He said, "You know, my decisions usually leave someone hurt, but ones like this are a joy."

Jennifer had not only changed her last name to Clayton, she also changed her first name to Kelley, at her own request. So, she'd walked into that courtroom as Jennifer Kelley Wood and came out as Kelley Clayton.

We had a big celebration that afternoon and held a reception at the church the following Sunday, where all our friends expressed their congratulations and blessings on our new family.

These girls could not mean any more to me if my own blood flowed in their veins. I've always felt they were my daughters, and I hope they've enjoyed the years of calling me Dad.

From daughter Wendy, 17 years later:

Pap I know you weren't there when I was growing in Nan's tummy but I know that I grew in your heart. You have shown me several times and in many ways that you love me the same. God could not have blessed me better!!! And you have definitely treated me VERY well. I love you for all you are and all you do. Thanks for being a GREAT Dad!

Love you bunches!
Wendy

Touching Shoulders

There's a comforting thought at the close of the day.
When I'm weary and lonely and sad,
That sort of grips hold of my crusty old heart
And bids it be merry and glad.
It gets in my soul and it drives out the blues,
And finally thrills through and through.
It is just a sweet memory that chants the refrain:
"I'm glad I touch shoulders with you!"

Did you know you were brave, did you know you were strong?
Did you know there was one leaning hard?
Did you know that I waited and listened and prayed,
And was cheered by your simplest word?
Did you know that I longed for that smile on your face,
For the sound of your voice ringing true?
Did you know I grew stronger and better because
I had merely touched shoulders with you?
I am glad that I live, that I battle and strive
For the place that I know I must fill;
I am thankful for sorrows; I'll meet with a grin
What fortune may send, good or ill,
I may not have wealth, I may not be great,
But I know I shall always be true,
For I have in my life that courage you gave
When once I rubbed shoulders with you.

Tick, Tick, Tick, KerBOOM!

October 24,1984

Job 37:7
So that all men he has made may know his work,
he stops every man from his labor

As usual, I was on a fast track at work, with a tremendous amount of stress. I'd just worked a six-week strike at a Coca~Cola plant with the Teamsters Union in West Virginia, and found the political ladder at the office harder to climb, with some taking the elevator.

My doctor, Yasoof Hamuth (I think he was from Arkansas), kept telling me to slow down. He said I was abusing my body as if I could get a new one. I should have listened.

This particular day, I'd had a busy morning of conference calls, reviewing equipment specs, and the usual intense dialogues. But, at least I was in my office in Ft. Lauderdale instead of traveling who knows where. When lunchtime finally arrived, I went across the street to my favorite deli, to put my body to the test once more. Lunch always has been one of my favorite times of day, an oasis in the middle of a desert. I especially like it on Fridays, in the fall of the year. And I looked forward to a great weekend with the family.

When I returned to my office, I plunged back into work

finalizing the equipment specs due by Monday. Then the phone rang and I turned to answer it. A sharp pain ran down my left arm and my chest tightened. I had a good idea what was happening. My first thought was to get out of that corporate tower. I didn't want to give them the satisfaction of seeing me die, if God was calling me.

Immediately, I went to the motor vehicle center and told Ralph Higbee I thought I was having a heart attack and was on my way to the doctor, about ten miles away. Ralph wanted to drive me, but I insisted, "No, I'll be okay. You have other things to do."

This was not one of the most brilliant decisions I've made in my lifetime. I could have killed someone on the way. After that, the story gets a bit vague.

Later, Dr. Hamuth's nurse told me that I'd made my way to his office and after one look at me, they rushed me to the ER. The security guard found my car in the doctor's parking lot—still running, with the driver's door open. Cardiac arrest at 44.

Early Saturday morning, I rallied above the trauma and sedation to see Bill Amos, my pastor, standing by my bed. I asked, "Bill, what are you doing here?" (Even though I didn't know where "here" was.)

He replied, "I was in Louisville for a pastor's conference when I received a call that you'd had a heart attack. I came to be here with you and your family."

A heart attack. That explained why I woke up in a room filled with enough equipment to send a rocket to the moon, with 500 miles of electrodes, monitors, and tubing attached.

Bill's voice sounded troubled. I faintly remember asking him, "Where is Nancy?"

He said, "She's resting right now. She's been here all night with several friends from the church."

I began to choke up as I realized how serious things were. Bill laid his hand on my arm. "Brother, all the way from Louisville, I kept asking God for the words to carry to your

bedside and each time, He gave me these: *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.* (Psalm 23:1-3)

"You see my friend, you *wouldn't* slow down, so He did it for you. Yet, He spared your life. He made you lie down, and the green pastures are the sterile green sheets you're lying on."

I suddenly had a profound sense of God's favor. I'd walked through the valley of the shadow of death, but He'd been with me. And still was—ever so close. I had many things to sort out. But right then, what I needed and wanted most was my Nancy. I asked Bill to get her. The nurse nodded, but said, "Only for five minutes."

Soon Nancy came in. It only took one look to see that she'd had a long night. Nancy always did a good job of hiding her emotions, and this was no exception. She leaned down, kissed me, and said, "How ya doin, honey?"

My emotions overcame me as I burst into tears, fighting anxiety and celebrating life at the same time.

Myriads of tests and procedures cluttered the next few days of my life. They transported me to another hospital for an angioplasty, removing three blockages that had caused the attack. Then I returned to my hospital to begin the long process of recuperation.

God's love surrounded me in a soft buoyant bubble of family and friends. Mom and Dad Merryman had hurried to my bedside. Nancy had called Mom on Friday evening before Dad had returned from a trip to Florida. (They're always there for us when needed, God love them.) My friend, John Douglas, stayed with me every day during recovery, in case I needed him. And countless friends from church responded with food, care for our girls, and—most important of all—prayer and support for Nancy.

I didn't know why God spared me, but the words from "Amazing Grace" kept going through my mind, especially,

"Who saved a wretch like me."

Eventually, I recovered, altered my lifestyle, and changed professions. And soon, we left South Florida to join the Word Publishing Company in Waco, Texas. God's tender presence still enveloped me, untying the knots that had hemmed me in so long. Amazing grace. "I was bound, but now I'm free."

Heading for the Finish Line
1986-2001

Word Publishing

Psalm 90:17
May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us;
establish the work of our hands for us—
yes, establish the work of our hands.

After my heart attack, I struggled with my future. I didn't want to go back to the stress at Coca~Cola. Internal politics also made me skeptical about job security. But I wondered, what else I could do?

So, Nancy and I took a trip through the south exploring other work options. I was convinced Coca~Cola was all I knew. Nancy kept telling me I was qualified to do more, applying my skills to other areas. But she had trouble convincing me. I didn't like change then any more than I do now, even if I knew it was inevitable. We explored a number of manufacturers and various business opportunities until we ran out of ideas. We were back to square one.

Then a short time later, I received a phone call from someone in Chicago saying, "This is the CORS Firm in Chicago. We have some questions to ask you regarding your resumé."

"Are you sure you have the right person?" I asked.

"Are you Harry Clayton at 1450 S.W. 70 Avenue in Plantation, Florida?"

He got that part right, but I hadn't sent him a resumé. And I wasn't interested in selling Coors Beer!

"This isn't Coors Beer, Mr. Clayton," he laughed. It's Career Opportunity Resources Services. We have your resumé and want to discuss a management position with a Christian publishing company in Texas."

I snipped, "Well, it's apparent you have my resumé, but I know nothing about Christian publishing and am not interested." (The syndrome of old school and no changes reared its ugly head once more.)

But I continued the conversation to find that CORS was a sister company of an executive search firm in New York where I'd sent a resumé regarding a position with another beverage company (which will remain nameless).

My resumé stated that I had experience in implementing and training personnel in telemarketing. It also noted that I was an ordained deacon. (The latter was a little risky on a resumé, but I am proud of my faith, regardless of the consequence.) The gentleman explained that the computer selected my resumé on the basis of these two attributes. He said an executive requested a phone interview.

That afternoon, I received a call from a Mr. Tom Stanton in Waco, Texas, home of Word Publishing Company. We talked about sports, our families, what he knew about Coca~Cola, and what I knew about Christian publishing, which wasn't much. When he asked why I took his call at home instead of at work, I explained that I was on medical leave recovering from a heart attack. But I assured him that if I was interested in the position, I could supply him with a clean bill of health.

Tom had a warm and convincing voice. I sent my updated resumé the next morning by Federal Express and, at Nancy's suggestion, included a family picture. Sending it Fed Ex and including the picture showed my interest, despite my resistance to change.

Within a few nights, Tom called again. We talked sports a bit, but primarily discussed Word Publishing and their open position. Although I listened with interest, I was reluctant to

comment. I had no experience in Christian publishing, had never heard of the company, and had no earthly idea where Waco, Texas might be. The only thing we knew about Texas was that some church friends came from there and were always raving about it. We always wondered why they were in South Florida, if Texas was that great.

In the end, I agreed to fly to Washington, D.C. to interview with Kip Jordan and Francis "Doc" Heatherly for the position of Director of Word Church Services. We started the interview with prayer, asking God to bless our conversations and bring about His will for the job.

Nancy and I went to Waco together for one final interview. The entire management team rolled out the red carpet. They made us feel like family and encouraged us to be part of their team. Then Nancy returned to Florida as I went with the team on a planned retreat. I listened and watched for two days as they developed a plan for the next five years. I was inspired. There were no verbal attacks. They were happy and transparent with each other. On Wednesday, after much prayer and discussion with Nancy, we made the decision to accept their offer in spite of a significant pay cut.

Wendy was a high-school senior. Since we were moving in March, so close to graduation, we gave her the option to stay in Florida to finish school. She chose to become a Texan. God took us safely to the Lone Star State, and we began a whole new phase of life. Our girls settled into school, and we soon discovered that Wendy needed a course in Texas history to graduate in four weeks. But God mercifully arranged for her to graduate, even though she didn't know much about the Alamo.

I'm thankful for the opportunity God gave me to earn my living at Word, doing God's work. In fact, Wendy gave me a plaque for my office that says:

> Working for the Lord doesn't pay much,
> But the retirement is out of this world.

Trusting Strangers

Galatians 6:10
Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Ever since I was old enough to remember, Granny always told me to not trust strangers. Not only did I hear that as a child, I also told my children, and now my grandchildren. ***Never trust a stranger!*** On the other hand, sometimes the warning doesn't apply—as when we moved to Waco.

Our realtor, Woody Rogers, and his wife, Anne, were the kind of Texans you read about: extremely cordial and never in a hurry for a decision. Because of their patience, we found a wonderful home. What a beautiful little place it was. Not fancy or plush, just a little brick house with two maple trees, a nice yard for our girls, running space for our prize dog "Shadow," and a wood-burning fireplace.

We decided this would be our home, provided we could afford the payments. Our move to Texas wasn't the most financially rewarding thing we'd done in our life. But it offered more serenity and healing from the heart attack I'd suffered.

We were living in a small apartment, so we were all very excited about the home. I could hardly wait until Monday morning to tell my colleagues about our good fortune.

When I mentioned the house to Ernie Owen, the patriarch of the publishing world, he asked if we'd found financing yet. He recommended First Federal Savings and Loan, a locally owned lending institution. I told him I'd certainly look into it.

I went to the bank on my lunch hour to see what kind of folks they were. The moment I entered the door my mind flashed back to my childhood days, going to the bank in Waynesburg with Pap Orndoff. A shiny strip of brass trimmed the teller cages and the floor gleamed with wax. The marble counter, visible vault, and large portraits hanging on the wall all signaled "old style" banking. I felt good just visiting.

I decided to plunge right in and boldly inquire about the possibility of a loan. I was just about to lift my arms to ward off the blows of rejection when the receptionist asked, "Would you like an application?"

Would I? Here I was—brand new to the city, not knowing a soul in Texas apart from work—and a total stranger treats me so kindly. How could we possibly go wrong with this move?

When I said I'd really appreciate an application, she collated about six pieces of paper from her files and said smiling, "You fill these out. And come back to see us now, ya hear?"

I took the paperwork with me and couldn't wait to tell Nancy what a pleasant experience I'd had. This would be a good place to start. In a couple of days I took the papers back to the kind lady and she said, "Have a seat. Mr. Maresh will be with you in a few minutes."

The minutes seemed like hours until a gentleman introduced himself as Bill Maresh and invited me to his office to chat. Nostalgia gripped me again as I glanced around Bill's large office. It looked like the archetype banker's office: family pictures, calculator, and a wood framed wall clock, used primarily to tell him when to go to lunch. The mahogany desk between us was so large I could hardly see Bill on the other side (but that was partly due to his small stature).

I began our conversation by telling him why we were

moving to Texas and where I'd be working. At the time, I didn't know he'd granted home loans to more than half the Word Publishing staff and knew most of them by their first name and how many children they had. I wasn't too far into the conversation when I realized this man was a local, with the same friendly attitude so many other Texans had.

He asked me what churches we had visited as he thumbed through our application and set it aside on the desk. My heart sank as we continued to talk. *Looks like I'm not a likely candidate for a home loan,* I concluded.

We discussed antique furniture, my Coca~Cola collection, and other assets listed on our application. Then he asked if I ever went to yard sales and auctions, and if so, would I be interested in going to a large one in Canton, Texas with him sometime? I couldn't figure out where he was going with all this. I was used to the cut-and-dried Florida business world: What are your assets, etc., etc.?

We talked for another half-hour or so. Bill Maresh wasn't your typical banker. He seemed so genuine, his questions all so personal. His calm manner of speaking inspired my trust. He again welcomed me to Texas and thanked me for trusting their bank.

I was ready to gather my papers and go to another bank. Even though he hadn't probed into my financial status that much, I suspected the interview was over. So I said, "Mr. Maresh, I'm new at my job and should get back to work. When will I know something about this home loan?"

He looked at me and smiled as he pointed to the application on his desk. "You mean this?"

Nervously I replied, "Yes sir. Is there any chance it will be approved?"

He smiled again and said "Harry, I approved this a half an hour ago as we were talking."

There it was again, that Texas warmth. I choked back the tears as I cordially thanked him and leaned across the four feet of mahogany to shake his hand.

Bill and I became best friends. He helped our kids with personal loans, he and his wife became frequent burger buddies of ours, and we "junked," as he called it, together some.

Bill has been a very important part of my life the last 16 years. We've prayed together, laughed together, and yes, even cried together. He and his wife Barbara stood at our side when Gran-Gran had her last stroke and was called home. He called frequently when illness hit our family and emailed new jokes. Recently, our friendship deepened as I grieved with him at the loss of his dear wife Barbara, who went to be with the Lord.

Bill, you are a true friend. I love you like a brother. Thanks for being there in my times of need and for proving to me that you *can* trust strangers."

Andy

Know what I mean, Verne?

This book wouldn't be complete without credit to my friend, Andy Walker. Our favorite line to each other has always been; "You know what I mean Verne?" The late Jim Varney used this line, speaking to his fictitious friend.

Andy and I met in March of 1985 on my first visit to Woodway Baptist Church in Waco, Texas. It was my first Sunday in Waco and after starting my career with Word Publishing. Nancy and the girls remained in Florida. Many of the employees of Word had recommended Woodway Baptist to me.

Since I'd rather be an hour early than a minute late for any event, I arrived at the church long before anyone else and had no idea where to go. That's when I ran into Andy, an associate pastor of the church. We small talked for a while about my employment and my family. Then he walked me to the auditorium and seated me right behind him and his wife, Elaine, for the service. As a newcomer, I appreciated his warm welcome.

We later joined this church as a family and became active in the Sunday school and other activities. Less than a year later, the chairman of the deacon board approached me about filling a vacancy. Since I'd been ordained as a deacon in

Florida, they felt I was qualified. But when I had lunch with the chairman and the pastor to discuss the position, I knew I'd have to tell them I'd been divorced. The Southern Baptists believe that a divorced man cannot serve as a deacon. I know what the Bible says about divorce, and God does not like it. But He doesn't turn His back on us either. I know He forgave me when I accepted Him.

After being denied the role of deacon, Andy, Elaine, Nancy, and I began a singles class for divorced people. Nancy and I had felt the pain they were feeling and could identify with their struggles. Andy and I became close friends through this ministry. We not only prayed together, but we did many other things. We felt we could trust each other to the end. And we still do.

One of my favorite stories about Andy involves a member of our class who'd had an accident that left him somewhat impaired. (Know what I mean, Verne?). Jerry came every Sunday and was a loyal class member, although he liked a little libation from time to time. One afternoon, Nancy and I were driving to the church and met Jerry pushing his bicycle. We stopped to say hello and I asked him if he'd been to the church. (Andy often gave him odd jobs to earn a little spending money.) He answered that Andy wasn't at the church, but was making calls.

I jokingly said, "Oh, he's not making calls. He's at a bar somewhere!"

Jerry looked over his glasses at me and said earnestly "You know I always thought Andy would take little nip." We laughed, but Jerry was sincere, so we drove away letting him think he was correct. But Andy and I have had many laughs over that story.

Andy and I also were hunting buddies. We hunted from the mountains of Colorado to the badlands outside Mexico. I've always kidded him about the little deer he shoots and the big ones I get. We were going one day to hunt on some land at Mochene, but couldn't find it from the directions the owner

had given us. We drove up and down country roads and finally Andy said, "I am going to go back and ask that old man that was sitting on the porch where this place is."

I didn't say a word, but knew he was in for a surprise. Andy backtracked about three miles to the spot where the old man was on the porch. When he rolled down his window to ask the old gentleman, he too discovered it was a Halloween dummy. I laughed and laughed. Finally, Andy said, "Why didn't you tell me that was just a dummy before I turned and drove back?"

I replied, "Because I thought maybe you could communicate with him." We drove at a little faster rate of speed, still looking for the farm. We finally found it and explored it thoroughly, planning our next morning's hunt for opening day.

The next day, we arrived about 5:00 AM and pulled the truck into the field to enjoy a cup of coffee before the hunt began. It was a brisk morning, but extremely dark. Daylight was at least an hour away. We were planning our strategy and Andy jokingly said, "God told me to go right out there by the fence and sit under that big oak tree, and He would send me a big buck." No sooner had he said that than a peacock at the farmhouse below gave a blood-curdling scream.

Andy looked at me in fright and said, "You know, maybe God was mixed up. He might have meant for me to go down over this other side instead." We have laughed about that many times since.

I've had a lot of fun at Andy's expense. Once, we'd just left Ridgecrest Nursing Home after visiting "Gran-Gran." I told Andy "Walker, if I ever get in the shape of those old folks in there, I want you take me out hunting and just shoot me." He grinned, but I went on to say, "On second thought, don't do it. You're such a poor shot you would only wound me and I'd be left to suffer."

Andy performed the marriage ceremony for two of our four children and a memorial service for Gran-Gran. He has helped us through many family crises and has always been

there for us in a time of need. I couldn't bear to take our dog, Shadow, to the vet to have her put to sleep. So, Verne, who did the job?

Like any deep friendship, we've had some sad times too. We had recently moved to Dallas when a friend called the week before Christmas to tell me Patrice Walker, Andy and Elaine's daughter, had been killed in an auto accident. I couldn't go to Waco as the roads were solid ice and police were telling people to stay home. So, I called Andy that night to express my sympathy and let him know I couldn't come. He answered, "We are okay. But how is Nancy doing?" Nancy was in the middle of her bout with Lyme disease. Andy's focus was on her, not themselves.

I cried and prayed with him and knew he had to be in a state of shock to be so calm. For four days, the weather got worse, and I couldn't get to my friend to share his sorrow. On the day of Patrice's private funeral he told me he was sitting in his chair and Elaine told him, "Andy, you need to get ready. We have to go to the service."

He was dressed then in his jeans and camouflage cap and parka. He replied, "I am dressed. This is what she liked me in." So, that's what he wore to the service. I was told there was a larger turnout for the memorial service than there had been for church the previous Sunday. Andy and Elaine stood in line and greeted friends after the service. We all miss her. She was a precious young lady.

Andy Walker is my friend. If he outlives me, he will be the pastor of choice to conduct my funeral. He is the only one I would ask to lie—just a little bit—and say what a good guy he knew me to be.

Drinking From My Saucer

I've never made a fortune
And it's probably too late now
But I don't worry about that much
I'm happy anyhow

And as I go along life's precious way
I am reaping better than I sowed
I'm drinking from my saucer
Cause my cup has overflowed

Haven't got a lot of riches
And sometimes the goings rough
But I've got loving folks around me
And that makes me rich enough

I thank God for his blessings
And the mercies He's bestowed
I'm drinking from my saucer
Cause my cup has overflowed

I remember times when things went wrong
My faith wore somewhat thin
But all at once the dark clouds broke
And the sun peeped through again

So Lord, help me not to gripe
About the tough rows I've hoed
I'm drinking from my saucer
Cause my cup has overflowed

If God gives me strength and courage
When the way grows steep and rough
I'll not ask for other blessings
I'm already blessed enough

And may I never be too busy
To help others bear their loads
Then I'll keep drinking from my saucer
Cause my cup has overflowed

A Buddy Leaves

June 7, 1985

Proverbs 18:24
A man of many companions may come to ruin,
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Bobby had lung cancer. It didn't seem fair. He'd worked hard, raised his family, and now he could relax a little and enjoy life. It was especially hard for me to accept the idea of losing Bobby. By now, all my closest relatives were gone, except for my father and one grandparent.

Uncle Bob was the ideal family man. He rarely went anywhere without Aunt Dixie, planned his activities around his kids and grandkids, and cared for Granny as she aged. His favorite spot in the whole world was in the middle of his family. He loved holidays and birthdays.

Uncle Bob never required much in life, but did well with what he had. That especially applied to their three daughters: Kathy, Debbie, and Robin and their son, Scott. Bobby attended more school events than anyone I knew. Their three girls were involved in every imaginable activity: band, sports, and even homecoming. Scott started playing football and wrestling when he was barely big enough to walk. Uncle Bob was always there to support them.

He never left Greene County. In fact, he only moved a few

yards down the road from Pap and Granny. He and Aunt Dixie both took care of Pap and Granny. I am thankful they stayed to do this. The rest of us split.

When Uncle Bob found he had cancer, I went to see him. He said, "Harry, I have the Big C and probably won't beat it. I hope I can, but I'm not too sure."

I was devastated and told him I'd pray for him.

He responded with a grin, "You do it, 'cause buddy I need it."

Bobby wasn't one to openly express his faith, but didn't ridicule those who did. His beliefs were private. Those who knew him well didn't invade that turf.

He had one lung removed. He never expressed the horrendous pain it caused, other than to say he was uncomfortable. He was tough and didn't want his children to see him suffer, but they all knew what he was going through.

We miss our buddy. He was a mentor, a brother, a confidant, and a true friend to me. He knew the hurt I'd felt and was always there to help and sometimes shield me.

I'll see you on the other side, partner. Find us a good fishing hole and stay out of it until I get there.

Lyme Disease

1987

2 Corinthians 1:3-4
Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

I was pumped! Kelley wanted to learn to hunt deer, and it was the first chance in several years for me to get back into the sport. I'd gotten a deer lease in Salado, Texas. Not only was this a nice place to hunt, but it also had a cabin with all the conviences, large enough for all of us to spend the weekend. Even Nana and J.J. joined the adventure.

The very first morning, both Kelley and I bagged our deer and took them back to camp, taking tons of snapshots to preserve the memory. For the next two weeks, it was all Kelley could talk about. There was even an article in the Waco *Tribune*, complete with her picture. Little did we guess at the time that our family adventure was about to take a tragic turn.

Two weeks later, Nancy and I went to Austin, Texas for a Word sales conference kickoff and weekend of fellowship. Sunday night the spouses returned to Waco while employees stayed for meetings. I called home on Monday night to find Nancy was very ill. A nurse friend of ours was there with her. Her symptoms resembled the flu, but much worse. In fact, our

friend urged me to come home. I drove home from Austin that night to find my wife in more pain than she'd ever had in our married life. She'd been to our family doctor that day and he treated her for influenza. On Tuesday, her pain was worse. So, I took her back to the doctor who stuck with his diagnosis, but suggested an internist if we wanted further—in his mind, unnecessary—testing. But this internist turned out to be a joke. Nancy was admitted to the hospital. Every imaginable test was run, but she remained gravely ill.

By now, four weeks had passed, enough time for a virus to run its course. Although the pain and fever would come and go, they were almost unbearably intense. Dr. Scott Lee, an infectious disease specialist, drew blood once more and sent it to Austin to test for everything from Rocky Mountain spotted fever to Muscular Dystrophy.

By now Nancy could not drive, cook, or manage any housework. Our friends at church and work brought food and drove our girls to their activities. I worked half days to help where I could.

Then one Saturday, I picked up an *Outdoor Life* magazine at the car wash that featured an article titled "Lyme Disease—The Ticking Bomb." I turned to the article and the more I read the more I understood what was wrong with Nancy. All of the symptoms of Lyme disease, caused by a tick bite, matched the ones of my precious mate.

I rushed home with the magazine and immediately went to her bedroom to read her the article. I called Dr. Lee, but he wasn't in on Saturdays. We had to wait until Monday.

When I called Nancy mid-morning Monday to tell her I was calling the doctor, she said that wasn't necessary. His office had just called her. Her blood tests had come back positive for Lyme disease. Finally, a diagnosis!

Since a month had already passed, Dr. Lee wasn't sure what treatment to use, other than the antibiotics Nancy already was taking. Her symptoms lingered: frequent headaches, fever, and memory loss, which only I detected, but didn't even

share with her. That Christmas wasn't the usual fun time, with Nancy sick. We went through the motions for the family's sake, but our hearts weren't in it. At last, the disease went into remission.

Not long after moving to Dallas with Word, someone at work told me of an article they'd read about a lady named Mamie Rich with Lyme disease. Since the disease was so rare, we read everything we could find about it and even made contact with Mamie, who became our good friend. Mamie put Nancy in contact with her doctor, Audrey Stein-Golding, who specialized in treating Lyme disease. And God's timing was impeccable. Nancy's headaches had returned, and her memory loss became more prevalent. She'd enrolled in Texas Women's University to finish her degree, but illness made it very difficult. She bravely pushed through, the entire family cheering her on.

Then—literally only weeks from graduation—Nancy became ill again and had to drop out of school to begin a treatment of Rocephin, called "the golden treatment," in reference to its cost. This required hospitalization followed by home care for two IV injections daily. We had a wonderful nurse who taught me to do the treatment. I could only inject my wife by realizing I was helping her more than I hurt her.

After the long treatment, the University informed us that Nancy had such good grades and enough credits not only to graduate, but also with honors—*Magna Cum Laude*. The entire family, including Nana, J.J., and two grandchildren, went to the graduation to see Nan get her diploma. We prearranged for the children to all take pictures; I wasn't sure I could handle it emotionally. Finally, they called her name—Nancy Merryman Clayton—and from the right side of the stage came the most beautiful sight I'd ever seen in my life. With her head held high and a smile crossing her face, Nan had made it. Only six weeks earlier, she had become so lost taking our daughter to school that she drove over a hundred miles before she could find her way home. She'd suffered a time of not

remembering her own children's names. Now, a student graduating with highest honors walked across the stage while her children cheered and I cried, thanking God for this miracle. This was my wife, my love, and my best friend, receiving recognition for the battle she'd fought.

Nan has arthritic conditions, low tolerance, and other symptoms from Lyme, but she doesn't complain. Instead, she's helped many people get a proper diagnosis for Lyme. Nancy began the Texas chapter of the Lyme Disease and helped many obtain information and treatment. Many victims have come to our home to seek her help and prayer.

Thank you, Ms. Nancy, for being such a good patient and for having the determination to win and achieve. You have been an inspiration to our family.

The Happy "C" Ranch

> All you need for happiness is a good gun, a good horse and a good wife.
>
> —Daniel Boone

The move back to Waco, Texas in '93 brought us closer to our friends and family, but it also brought a lot of job stress back into my life. Corporate politics were mounting, relocation was always a threat, and I needed a safety valve for my frustrations.

Nancy and I discussed looking for some property for our few cattle and a place to hunt. Our kids and grandkids could use it for their recreation as well. Nancy, being the tiger she is, began the search. Three months later, I made a trip to look at the fruit of her labor. It was the most desolate, run down, dilapidated, barren, piece of dirt I had ever seen. But. . . it had potential.

The fences were mere threads of metal; their posts losing the battle to the dirt of the past twenty years. And the barn had only half the roof it needed. But there was a nice pond where the kids could fish, and it had plenty of mesquite trees, if we decided to start a charcoal or furniture business. So, what the heck. Why not buy it?

Sandra Carey best explains our rationale:

Never mistake knowledge for wisdom.
One helps you make a living;
the other helps you make a life.

The Happy C Ranch definitely applied to life, rather than a living. It was a little short on size for a ranch, but for our purposes, it was just right. We could envision the home site, our fenced yard, and a few cattle roaming in the pasture. There'd be shade trees beside the pond, picnic tables for our homemade ice cream, and a little red barn, perhaps with a pony. This would be our dream place, all spruced up and waiting for me to retire.

We jumped into action. I hired a bulldozer to clear the land, built yards and yards of new fence, and moved our herd of cattle from Salado to their new home. We built a tin barn, corrals, loading chute, and the whole nine yards. We also built another pond which never held water. This might have been God's first sign to me that I wasn't meant to be a rancher. But I bought more cattle, purchased the adjoining 40 acres, and we were on our way to becoming another King Ranch. The only difference was that the Kings had more funds.

I enjoyed the weekends of hard work and was so thankful that our son-in-law, "Smitty" was there—even when I was not—to help me make it through. He dug fence postholes through rock, cut mesquite, chased cattle and kept our little tractor "JJ" running. We converted the old "cat house" into a barn, cultivated the land, and even made a site for Scott, Dixie, and Michael to build a home.

I found a special spot under two mesquite trees by the pond where I would go in times of need and sit on the tailgate of my old pickup talking to God. If nothing else came from the ranch, it served its need. I got closer to God than I had in several years, right in that spot.

I happily roamed the farm on my four-wheeler, many times with a grandkid on the back. Tyler especially loved going to the ranch with Pap and feeding the cows. He'd get his little "glubs" (gloves) Nan bought for him and spend hours helping me do the chores. Added value to the farm.

Our cattle herd increased, but two years of drought and a

coyote attack made it tough to survive. I bought hay at twice the normal price just to feed the cattle through the summer, with winter still to come. I was about over the hump of expenses to break even the following year when job relocation loomed—*again*.

What would I do? Take early retirement and just run the ranch? Not a wise move. I was supporting it on a full-time salary. Relocating to Nashville became a reality. I needed at least five more years of investment and job security to prepare us for retirement.

We moved to Nashville and closed the Happy C Ranch chapter of our life. The cattle went to market, the manicured fields and fence lines returned to their overgrown state.

It's sad for me to go back and see the ranch in its run down condition. Thankfully, we sold the "best corner" to our kids, which they maintain beautifully. I have good memories from this old place. Someday they'll scatter my ashes over its beloved, though stubborn soils. If some should fall into a cow pile, I'll all the sooner return to dust.

A Talk With My Friend

It's a new year, Lord. *I thought I'd sit with you a spell to share what's on my heart. No, I am not asking for anything this time. I just want to thank you for some things you've already given me over the years.*

We had a good year on the ranch, considering how it started. We got all the crops in, the calves have gone to market, and we have plenty of hay. Oh, we could have used a little more rain in the summer, but we're very grateful for what you sent. We did all right. But you sure gave us a wet one two weeks ago! Everyone else must've already had all they needed.

I love that old farm, Lord. It's surely been fun and has taken a lot of stress out of my life. But didn't you bless it especially well with mesquite and cactus? I'm just about ahead of them now, so I guess I've got plenty—in case you're interested.

You know Lord, it's been almost 14 years ago that you led to me to Christian work. Gosh, it doesn't seem that long, does it? I'll always remember when Wendy gave me that little plaque for my office that reads "Working for the Lord doesn't pay much, but the retirement is out of this world." I've been so fortunate to get to know some of the wonderful Christian folks you've brought me. You've really given me some good years. I'm sorry for those I messed up so badly, but I guess you've already forgotten them. All the rest are yours to have me do whatever you will.

The kids are all doing well, and as you well know I love them all a lot. Thanks for each of them, the new son-in-law you're bringing my way, and those little grandkids that are just too beautiful for words. You gave me those little chaps at a time in my life when I was really needing them. As I've grown older, I've learned to appreciate some things in life a whole lot more than I used too. They are all keepers, every last one of them. Don't worry about filling my cup, it's already running over and I'm drinking from the saucer.

Soon it'll be twenty years since you brought Nan my way. That's another time you were really looking out for me. You know Lord, I might not ever have come your direction if you hadn't done that. She's really been an inspiration to me and brought me more love and caring than I really knew how to handle. I almost messed that one up, too, if you hadn't got hold of me back in '81.

I really have been on the edge a lot, haven't I? Why did you always pull me back to center? I guess, like Nan; you could see something I couldn't. Thanks again.

Well, it's getting late. I appreciate the time we've had together. I just wanted to be with you to let you know how glad I am to know you and express my gratitude for all your blessings. No, this isn't all of them, but just

a few that stand out in my mind—as if you didn't already know all of this.

Good evening, Lord. I'll be back again. And thanks for staying ahead of me. I need your pathway daily. Someday, I want to follow it home to you.

Harry
December 1997

June 13, 1995

Dear Children,

This year for Father's Day, I'd like to give you my perspective of fatherhood and what it's meant to me.

First, I must admit that it's not easy to be a dad, and I know that at times I've fallen short. I hope you can overlook those times and forgive me. You, my children, are my life treasures, my rewards here on earth.

It seems only yesterday that you were all just little shavers. Now look at you–growing bigger and doing well. You have given me the desire to go on, to grow with each of you, and to watch you cross the threshold into adulthood. I know you're made of good stuff.

Thanks for all the sweet things you have done for me–the gifts, the notes, and pictures you send. Old Dad loves those kisses when I see you, girls. And hugs from from guys mean a lot, too!

I'd like nothing more for Father's Day than to know you have each placed your trust in God to guide you. There was a time I didn't, and failure came in bunches. When I learned my life was empty without Him and started trusting Him in all decisions, things got better. God will never fail you; you already know from experience that man will. So go to Him as you made decisions, raise your kids, and plan your future. He knows your every need.

Finally, keep life simple. Don't worry about what others are doing; focus on your own life. Achievement is the reward of good deeds and effort; it eludes self-serving and deception. (Funny how dads know more about being young than kids know about being old.) But please remember, I have tried the rest, and God is best.

You have given me everything I need–memories, love, and the hope to go on. Your old Dad is glowing with pride, especially in my golden years. It's good to be your dad!

I love you,

Dad

Word Publishing (Reprise)

The Real Thing

"The Real Thing." I loved that slogan. But I worked for Coca~Cola for twenty-five years only to discover that ***God's work*** was the real thing, not Coke.

My fellow workers at Word would never think of compromising anyone else to gain their own success. We were blissfully free from politics and hidden agendas. Both the work and the product were about saving and improving lives. That was a new but very welcome focus for me.

I enjoyed my work at Word, and still do some 16 years later. I took principles I'd learned over the years and applied them to a totally different business. But you know what? They worked! I led a floundering division into a successful year, then began improving the system one piece at a time. Eventually, our division became an integral part of the company.

One thing I learned in my earlier career was to see the need for change and find ways to achieve it. I could tell when a major decision was coming—or needed to be—simply from having done that myself. The management team of Word began to change, bringing in a stronger business mentality. After two or three days of working under a newly appointed president, I told Nancy (and others) Word wasn't long for Waco. Our new president, Gary Ingersoll, was going to make

some major changes.

The first major change was sprucing up the building and changing a lot of operations. Streamlining meant the business was going up for sale. In fact, it was obvious to me that Gary's sole purpose in coming was to sell the business. It didn't fit the mold of Capital Cities/ABC, the owners. Although they owned several publishing companies, none of them were Christian. Our margins didn't match the margins produced by secular companies, where profit was the primary goal.

In the fall of '86, the announcement came: the majority of the company would relocate to Dallas. That included the major publishing identities, accounting, and data processing. My division was one of the few that remained in Waco. We did our business independent of the other divisions but needed to be close to the distribution center to access 24-hour shipment. When the other employees left, I felt like the little boy who had missed the bus.

I continued to operate from Waco that winter, making weekly trips to Dallas for meetings and to "check in". But it wasn't long before we received news that my division was moving, too. Kelley was a freshman, and we hated to move her again. We made several house hunting trips to find a home we liked, a good school district, and a community we *loved*: Coppell, Texas.

We thought we were settled for life, until there was more news. Now Word was being sold to Thomas Nelson, the largest Christian publisher in America. Somehow, I knew this meant another move.

The takeover came in the fall of '93. In December, I moved my division back to Waco while most of my colleagues left for Nashville. I'd missed the bus again. But I had been told I could live there until retirement. My division wouldn't move. Yeah, right.

We made it until '97 when the word came to relocate to Nashville. I resisted. Nan had started a business, Gran-Gran Clayton wasn't physically up to moving, and our kids were in

Waco. So, I bid Word goodbye and started Church Growth International in partnership with a local businessman. I wish I could say this business proved successful. But for reasons too numerous and personal to cite, it didn't.

It did succeed in arousing the interest of The Thomas Nelson Company, however. They liked what I was doing and the products I was marketing. They offered to buy the business and wanted me to relocate with it. In the end, the business deal fell through, but I accepted a position with them. So June of '98 found Nancy and me on our way to Nashville. Another move.

I agreed to stay five years and still have two years left (as of 2001). Was this a good decision? Only God has the answer and He'll reveal that in His time. We're a long way from our kids and grandkids—who mean so very much to us—but we are closer to the Merrymans, and visit them often. Happiness is a frame of mind, and we'll claim that as we live out our promise.

My favorite passage, Proverbs 3:5-6 says it best:

> *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*

The Fat Lady Sings

Psalm 23:6
Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Just as life is winding down, my writing too must draw to a close. It's been good—though painful—to get some things off my chest. Somehow, life seems less mysterious, peace more profound, forgiveness more complete than when I began. My life could have been much worse. And by God's grace, I've come to understand that.

As I look back over the past sixty-plus years, I can see God's goodness and mercy to me, in spite of my resistance. I only wish I'd chosen to follow Him sooner. I try to thank Him daily for His blessings. One thing I know for sure, for sure, for sure: real happiness only comes to those who find a way to serve.

I hope this book brings my children some knowledge of their forebears and a little more of me. Have I told it all? No. There are some things meant to remain between only God and me, and wisdom is the art of knowing what to overlook.

You, too, have a book that lives inside of you. I'd encourage you to pour it out. What you see on paper might surprise you.

Best Regards,
Pappy

Epilogue

September 17, 2001

I've found over the years that no author wants to turn loose of his book and give it to the editor. That's certainly the case with this one. But I want to thank some people who have helped me: Mary Guenther, who labored over each chapter in editing and design; Jennifer Deshler, for her attention to detail in poring over every sentence to weed out the dross; each of the people mentioned who have influenced my life; and especially my dear wife Nancy, who has been an inspiration for me to write it.

Since I finished what was to be the last chapter four months ago, a lot has occurred that is worthy of mention. I have decided to take early retirement at the end of March, 2002 to enjoy what is left of my life. I reached this decision after losing three close friends near my age this past year and seeing my life for what is left, not what has been. Nancy and I have places to go, family to love, and some work to do for the Lord. My loving wife and faithful partner of 23 years is entitled to a portion of my life uninterrupted by a twelve-hour workday, airplane travel, and long distance love. I want to spend time with my buddy, so passing the baton to younger folks to carry seems like the prudent way.

Retirement will be hard for me, but I know it has to happen. I look at it as the reward for all the long hours of working on the farm in Pine Bank, loading lumber at the old sawmill, and the many cases of Coca~Cola I carried. It's an opportunity to work at my own pace without alarm clocks,

unnecessary meetings, and answering that darned phone. I'll stay active, but when I get the urge to be inactive, my only reporting structure will be God.

I've one more reason to write a final chapter. I want to share my prospective on the terrible tragedy of September 11, 2001. Had I not already made retirement plans, this would have influenced me to do so. I urge anyone who is near the retirement age to stop and reevaluate your priorities and ask yourself: "When is enough, enough? What good are earthly things if we see them shattered before our eyes? Better yet, how can I better spend time with my family? How much time is left me?"

When I see thousands of people mourning the loss of loved ones and watch our landmarks and symbols of democracy torn to shreds, it puts my life in perspective pretty quick. Who wouldn't give all they have ever earned to prevent such a catastrophe? Yes, we need resources to live, but when does an abundance become greed?

I remember the terror of World War II and hearing Granny pray for the "poor soldier boys who had to fight." Then came the unexplainable Korean conflict that resulted in the loss of many lives. The Cuban crisis, Desert Storm and other acts of war were bad, but can't compare to the impact of being attacked on our own soil.

We must all rally to the cause of Christ. Pray that those who have taken such action someway be overcome so our country can rest at the end of each day. We must pray daily for our wonderful country. As the great John Kennedy once said; "Let us not ask what our country can do for us, but what we can do for our country."

I urge our children to make prayer a part of their daily lives and encourage children to pray at home even if they can't pray at school. Let them know what a great country they are living in and explain to them these terrible acts of violence were committed by people who did not know God.

Thanks dear reader for giving me the time to share my life

with you. As I look back, the "waiting on the wall" might have been worth it. I have done well since and my cup is overflowing.

GONE TRAVELING WITH MY BEST FRIEND

Items of Interest

The following may interest some and bore others, but I'd like to record them for the sake of history. Maybe someday my grandchildren would like to know more about "Pappy."

My Favorites:

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6:
Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Movie: *Spencer's Mountain*
Hymn: *It Is Well With My Soul*
Food: Steak and hot dogs
Sport: Hunting
Era: The 1800s
Season: Fall (October)
Actor: John Wayne
Actress: Maureen O'Hara
Pastime: Working on my computer

People—other than family—who have influenced me:

Rev. Bill Amos	Influential in my salvation and later baptized me
Ella King	My first teacher, who taught me right fromwrong
Billie & Freda Hanks	A couple who made it the hard and honest way
Gary Ingersoll	A man who taught me much about business
Mr.Brown	An example of how *not* to treat others
Robert F. Eakin	Betty's grandfather, who did well despite his handicap
Jack Wells	Started with Coca-Cola washing bottles, later owned a franchise
Ernie Owen	The gentleman of Christian publishing who mentored me
Kip Jordan	A friend who exemplified Christ in all that he did

The most memorable day of my life:

The day I went forward in our church with a life filled with sin and sorrow and left it all at the altar in exchange for my soul.

Appendix

The Family Album

Snapshots of Important People in My Life

Great Grandparents

I've been richly blessed. I remember three of my four sets of great grandparents. Most people today are lucky if they know their grandparents, let alone a generation farther back. Though I don't have their birthdates, I do remember six of them going to be with the Lord.

John and Lorena Morris

John M. and Lorena M. (Morris) Morris were the parents of my maternal grandmother, Neva May Orndoff (Granny). Granpap Morris was a fine carpenter and craftsman and built his first house at the age of 14. In later life, he and Grandma Morris moved to a brick house in Rogersville, Pennsylvania.

Because Granpap liked the taste of Iron City beer too well to suit Grandma, she left to make her home with Uncle Johnny and Aunt Dorothy Morris. Grandpap then batched in the old Rogersville planing mill, roamed the roads on foot, and drank beer. Although they never divorced, they lived apart for the last 21 of their lives.

Ma, as her boys called her, was one of the finest ladies you ever met. She dipped Garrett snuff but you never saw a drop on her print apron, which she always wore.

Grandpap Morris died in Torrance; a home for the mentally ill, and Grandma Morris lived into her 90s. In 1961, she became a great- great grandmother to our son Michael. Mike was a double five-generation baby, as his great-great grandmother Dora McNeeley from his mother's side was also living.

Charles and (name unknown) Woodruff

The Woodruffs were the father and mother of my paternal grandmother, Amy Jane Woodruff Clayton (Grammy). Both were deceased before my time and no record of their birth or death was available to me. They were from the Ruff Creek area, where they migrated from Lippencott. Grammy spoke very little about her father but loved her "dear mother."

Charles Stillwagon and Mary Etta Huffman Orndoff

They were the father and mother of Robert Carl Orndoff, my paternal grandfather. Both were born and raised in Jackson Township, and after marriage lived in the house where I was raised. Pappy Charley was a teamster, rig builder, and farmer. He was as ornery as they came and a practical joker from the word go.

When Pap Orndoff was courting Granny, he purchased a box of candy to take her on their next date. Pappy Charley saw Pap put the candy up in the cupboard. So, without anyone seeing him, he ate all the chocolates and replaced them with pony poop. Pap took "the candy" to Granny next Saturday night. *Surprise*, Granny!

I never knew my great grandmother Orndoff. She died when my mother was just three years old. Pappy Charley later married Flossie Goodwin, a nurse who'd cared for him while

he was a patient in Waynesburg hospital. Grandma Flossie never had a bad day and was a caregiver to all who knew her. They moved to Waynesburg and lived at the corner of Richill Street and Second Avenue, where the house still stands. Pappy Charley ran a dump truck service and loved to run foxhounds.

I remember when they celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary and all the "tons of fun" family came for the gala event. As you can imagine, food was plentiful and conversation was even more abundant. It came time to take pictures and the guests of honor took their places. They had posed for several shots when Aunt Carrie Grimes said, "I'll tell you, that is a good looking couple sitting there."

Pappy Charley said, "Yeah, not too bad—if you don't look Floss straight in the face."

Pappy Charley always called me Sam, my daddy's name. When I asked him one time why he did that, he replied "You should be proud to be called that and look and act like he did."

Flossie cared for Pappy Charlie until she died. Then his health forced him to live with Uncle Frank and Aunt Mary Forshey until the Lord called him home.

Samuel and Ellen Sanders Clayton

These were the parents of Earnest Oliver Clayton, my paternal grandfather. They lived on Richill Street in Waynesburg. They looked like a picture-perfect couple you might see in a magazine. He was bald and wore wire-rimmed glasses, and grandmother wore her silver-white hair in a bun. Both of them always looked impeccable.

Great Grandfather Clayton was a fine carpenter, specializing in furniture and cabinets. He spent his life in this trade, doing everything by hand, including the fancy scrollwork and miters. I have two walnut stools he made for my father and me, and you can still see his craftsmanship in many homes

around Waynesburg.

Great Grandmother loved making quilts, especially for babies. She would carefully hand stitch each little square into place without a flaw. My fondest memories are having a piece of her famous bread with homemade apple butter. I was always lucky enough take home a pint of it to last me until my next visit.

This couple lived their lives with the same perfection as they did their work. Great Grandfather had a stroke and passed away when I was quite young. Great Grandmother lived alone in her little house on Richill Street for a while, then went to live with Grandad and Grammy Clayton. She wasn't comfortable living with them. She missed her own furniture and household items, and chafed under the stringent house rules her son imposed. The agony of missing her mate did not last many years, however. One day, she willed her life to the Lord and went to be with him.

Yes, I was richly blessed to have great-grandparents to be a part of my life. I am thankful for the memories and hope someday this information will be passed on to my grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Granny Orndoff

Born May 9, 1897 Neva May Morris daughter of John M. and Lorena Morris, mother of Marjorie Dale and Robert "Bobby" Orndoff. Grandmother who raised Harry Allen son of Marjorie. Went to meet her Lord Jesus October 18, 1995. Granny knew where she was going at age ninety-eight.

Combine the motherhood of the Virgin Mary with the loving heart of Mother Teresa and the fortitude of Corrie Ten Boom and you have "Granny" Orndoff, my maternal grandmother. She came from a family of ten children and did more work than any woman and most men in the county.

Everyone loved her and said only good things about her. There were zero curse words in her vocabulary. If she could not say a kind thing about someone, she kept her thoughts to herself. She was a part of my life for more than 55 years and my memories can be summed up in one word: LOVE.

Like a pioneer woman, she lived all her married life in one house, and buried her husband, son, daughter, and most of her siblings. I hope this chapter gives her the praise she deserved in life but never received.

Granny sometimes had a tendency to get things mixed up. Once she called in an order for groceries to our little local store operated by Harvey and Jennie Cole. She carefully wrote everything down before she got on the old crank phone and went through her list without any problem until she came to "sewing machine needles." We all got a big laugh when Granny told Jenny she needed "sheen-ma-needles." Even Granny thought it was funny after she got over the initial shock of saying it.

Granny and Pap, like any other couple, had their times of disagreements. Quite a few, in fact. During one of those exchanges of verbal opinions, Pap said one of Granny's recent decisions didn't show good judgment.

Granny met his challenge with, "Well Bob, you're not so smart either, and if any one took a good look at me, they'd *know* you didn't have good sense." I don't think that was the way she meant for that to come out.

Granny was very meticulous and never liked dirt in any form. Back in the days of the old Maytag wringer washing machine, she'd carry hot soapy water to the clothes-line and wash it not once, but three times. Many times, I saw her taking clothes to the line when a piece would fall from her old wicker basket to the green grass. That piece was laid aside and taken back to wash again before it was hung with the rest. Her bed was her haven and none was allowed to sit on it or even brush against it. She always wanted to wash her dishes herself by hand, and rinse them several times with scalding water. Any dish that happened to touch her clothes while she was drying it had to be washed again.

We had a wonderful water supply that came from a stone-lined spring and fed into a covered reservoir on the hill. Twice yearly, Granny insisted it be drained, and we would go up with every kind of soap and disinfectant you can imagine to give it a thorough cleaning and put new screen on the windows. No matter how many of us joined her, it was her job to do the final cleaning and lock the door—*we* weren't qualified.

Another quirk of Granny's.

She and I spent many evenings by ourselves as Pap had a "lot of business in town." I especially loved Saturday night as we would take our evening stroll to the garden, laugh and tell stories then get our Saturday night bath and listen to the WWVA Wheeling Jamboree or WCKY Cincinnati, Ohio. Granny loved old hillbilly and southern music and sometimes she'd get carried away and sing with them. Spare me Hank Williams, please. As we listened to that old fiddle music, Granny would be working either preparing food for Sunday's dinner, studying her Sunday school lesson or patching and mending clothes. She seldom sat down and rested and would stay up until the wee hours of the morning but still get up at the crack of dawn.

We had a party line telephone with a ring of two shorts and a long to the number of 2736. This was not only a means of communication but entertainment for Granny and other women of the community. No matter whose ring they all "listened in" to the conversation. Granny said it was so she could find out if anyone was sick in the community that needed help. Right, Granny.

One time she was talking to Aunt Dale and a question came up regarding their upcoming W.S.C. S. meeting. Since neither of them knew the exact date and needed to get closure on it, Granny said "Dale, I am just not sure when it is but . . . Flora are you on there?" Sure enough, Flora had been listening the whole time and when asked, it now became a three-way conversation for the remaining two hours. Talking on the phone was one of the very few enjoyments the dear soul got in her life and all those years of "tagging the line" as it was called caused Granny to hold the receiver high above her head when she talked. This habit developed due to holding the receiver that way so the other parties could not hear her breathing as she got the scoop from their conversation.

Sunday dinner was a big treat at our house. We usually had some company or relatives come. If you ever sat at

Granny's table, you would know why. She fried chicken that she had killed and dressed the day before, wrapped in a perfectly white cloth, and put it in the trusty old General Electric refrigerator. This delicacy was served with hand-mashed potatoes, floating with homemade butter, more of those green beans, sweet potatoes or sage dressing and finally that golden gravy over biscuits. If you had not reached your fill from a meal that would put Colonel Sanders to shame, you'd have some of her mincemeat or raspberry pie topped with some homemade ice cream. Needless to say, we never had a problem filling all the chairs around that old oak table on Sunday afternoon.

Since Granny spent a lot of lonely days and nights by herself or just the two of us, Uncle "Boxer" Glen decided she needed a pet. Due to her cleanliness about the house, a dog was out of the question. She didn't need any more old cats hanging around to multiply so he got her a parakeet that she named Tony. I am not sure how he got that name but she thought "Old Tony" was the prettiest thing she had ever seen. In fact, she taught him to talk and the first thing he said was "Pretty bird." His vocabulary increased and then sentences started forming like "Granny's pretty bird" and finally "Tony is Granny's pretty bird." She spent hours talking to that bird telling him how "Granny's back hurts" and he repeated that and added "Tony's back hurts too."

Tony talked about Santa Clause at Christmas, said, "Cover me up" at bedtime, and threw in a few colorful words Pap taught him. Old Tony lived for several years adding pleasure to Granny's life until one morning she uncovered his cage, and there laid Tony with his feet sticking straight in the air. This was a sad time for all of us, and although Tony deserved a royal funeral and proper burial, Granny could not part with him. She wrapped him in paper, tucked him neatly in a plastic bag, and gave him a permanent resting place in the freezer next to the pole beans and pork chops. Tony occupied that space until Granny went to the nursing home.

The township we lived in elected a tax collector every four years. Granny held this office for six or seven consecutive terms and usually was unopposed in the election due to being so well liked and doing an efficient job. Each year she went to three locations on specific days to collect the taxes from the local folks. Many came to pay their taxes, which also gave them a chance to visit others and share the gossip of the community. Anyone who could not come on those specific days was always welcome to come to our house to "ante up" except for Sunday, which was the Lord's Day. The taxes could also be mailed if none of the options met their schedule. I can see her yet, sitting at the kitchen table, opening all those envelopes, stamping the checks and hand writing the receipt to return by mail. Many returns had a personal note enclosed inquiring about her health, the family, or how her garden was doing. She always returned a note with their receipt wishing them well or congratulating them on a new family member or maybe just to say hello. This was a fun time for me, as a little boy, cause I would get to see all the neighbors when they came. I also pretended I was the collector as Granny worked at the table and handed me the extra envelopes and other mail she opened in the process. More good memories with my buddy.

Granny had many sayings that have carried through the years:

- If you don't behave, the "SCRATCH" will get you!
- Better have on clean underwear in case we have a wreck on the way.
- Oh Deed! you don't say!
- My, oh my, I can't go. I don't have my hair done.

Thanks, sweet lady, for those precious pearls you left us.

Pap Orndoff

Robert Carl Orndoff, father of Marjorie and Robert (Bobby). Born February 3 1900, to Charles Stillwagon and Etta Huffman Orndoff. Died June 17, 1975.

Born next to youngest in a family of two boys and five girls, Bob (Brownie) was the pet of the family. This was probably partly because he was often sick as a child. He lived in the same house his entire life and went to church and school where his father had. His uncles Ed, Burt, and Jesse were his role models, and he had a tremendous amount of respect for them. Pap never said much about his mother, who died when he was fairly young. But he often talked about Grandpa Huffman (his mother's father) and what a godly and meticulous man he was. In fact, he passed on many of Grandpa Huffman's traits and sayings to me.

One morning, they were putting up hay in the meadow across from our house and Grandpa had said that he planned to build one hay shock for every year of his age. Now this doesn't seem like much work, unless you are 73 years old. That evening after supper, as they all sat in the front yard under the big pine trees, Grandpa Huffman started counting the shocks over in the meadow. Pap said it was easy to tell which were Grandpa's, because they were so neatly raked and groomed, they looked as though they were built to be photographed. After counting the fruits of his

day's labor, he got up, went down to the barn, got his pitchfork and headed back to the meadow to build one more. He'd miscounted and built only 72!

Another story Pap Orndoff loved to tell was that Grandpa Huffman always wore a white shirt on Sunday in respect of the Lord's Day. During dinner one Sunday, Grandpa dropped gravy on his shirt. He immediately asked to be excused and changed shirts before finishing his meal. Pap was responsible, through his story telling, for us to know our family history.

I've mentioned before that Pap Orndoff was a hard taskmaster. All of his generation were hard workers and lived a tough life, and he was no exception. Had it not been for Pap, I would never have had a father figure. I'm thankful he cared enough to take me as another son to raise. His language was coarse, his behavior not always perfect (as I've been told), but he was the one who provided me with a home. And we shared many fun times, as well as hard work and discipline.

I learned a lot from Pap, such as how to work, respect others, and that being poor is not a sin. We had little money, just coming out of the great depression and a war. In spite of the bad economy, Pap provided for us the best he could. He owned a lumber business as well as the farm, and was moderately successful at both. He could place the value of a tract of timber with one walk-through and guess the weight of a cow within 50 pounds. He smoked King Edward cigars, never drank alcohol, never carried a pocketknife, and always drove a pretty nice car, usually running on empty.

We were the first family in the country to have electricity, but it came from a 32-volt system with a dynamo and storage batteries. This system was a bit cumbersome and provided very weak light, but it got us out of the gaslights and other inconveniences of poverty.

We were also the first family in the area to have television. Granny fought this purchase with everything she had. She thought TV was of the devil, and it also cost a lot more money

than we could afford. But Pap was determined. It was a 12-inch black and white, but even the test pattern looked good to us. Pap was so proud of his new appliance. People came from miles around to watch the Wednesday and Saturday night boxing matches. Pap would rare back in his big chair, light up one of his stogies, and smile from ear to ear.

Pap's pleasures in life (that I knew of) were playing Cinch with Uncle Glenn, Aunt Helen, and me, and Saturday night square dances in town. He loved having family come—especially for Sunday dinner—and homemade ice cream, although he wasn't too keen on getting hold of the crank to make it. He came home from work at night, got his belly full, and often lay down on the floor, asking me to "dig his head." This meant combing his hair, only a lot rougher. I never tired of anything in my life, and the more tired I became, the harder I dug, in hopes of it hurting so I'd get to quit.

Pap entertained himself and any one else who would listen by playing the ukulele and singing "The Red River Valley," "Mansion Over a Hilltop," and "Roll 'Em Girlies Roll 'Em." He knew only four chords but had a wonderful tenor voice. He sang in a Gospel quartet in his later years after getting somewhat more involved in church. Pap always observed the Lord's Day on Sunday but seldom attended church. I never saw him read the Bible. He scorned Granny for listening to the radio to those "preachers begging for money." Those were great preachers, mind you, like Garner Ted Armstrong, Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, and Rex Humbard. But that didn't matter to Pap. I always felt he wanted to live a purer life but had to protect his "manly image" that was so important in those times.

While Pap was a good provider for the household, he expected Granny to do her part in working the fields and other chores. She'd feed the livestock, milk the cows, plant and can the garden produce, and still serve as a mother.

After Uncle Bob married Aunt Dixie, they lived with us for several years. Finally they moved to their own home, not more

than 300 yards from our house. That day Pap cried like his heart was broken, the first time I ever saw him cry. He was from the old school that believed a family should all live together and never leave one another. I guess that was one reason he was bitter about my parent's divorce. It "wasn't the thing to do" in that part of the country. Pap never seemed to show the same affection to my mother that he did to Uncle Bob, but again, that was a part of the patriarchal mindset of the times. Sons were number one.

The biggest event of Pap's life was taking a trip to California with a friend. Lord, everyone in the county heard that story at least once and the unlucky ones in the immediate family heard it for what seemed like a hundred times. Another memorable time was when the railroad was coming through his land and he felt their settlement was unreasonable. The surveying was done, the bulldozers on their way, and the construction crew at the fence line between the Klein farm and ours. Pap met the crew with a rifle at dawn and threatened to shoot the first one who crossed the line into his property. Needless to say, he called the bluff of the workmen and their superiors but didn't impress the law. In the end, his farm was condemned and he received minimum payment.

Pap retired early for what he called reasons of health, but I think in truth he was overcome by debt and retirement was his only escape. He had no retirement fund other than a little Social Security to keep Granny and him in their later years. The going was rough. Health complications from diabetes and other ailments led to the amputation of a leg and soon, death.

Since this was the first death of a close relative in my family, I chose not to attend his funeral. I've wished many times that I had, but I couldn't stand the pain of saying goodbye to him. Consequently, I've really never gotten closure on Pap's death. But I have many good memories from my years with him and God knows how good he was to me. Maybe writing his story will help me close that chapter. But if not, I'll join Pap someday and ask all those remaining unanswered questions I

have.

Rest in peace, Pap. And when you and Granny are together at the Lord's table tonight, try to remember to not "slurp your soup or eat your meat with your fingers," as Granny always said.

Grammy Clayton

Born Amy Jane Woodruff, on March 3, (year unknown) to Charles Woodruff and (maternal mother unknown); mother of Samuel; died December 20, 1983.

My paternal grandmother, Amy Jane, ("Grammy" to me) grew up in the Ruff Creek area of Greene County. She was a proud lady, taught to hold her head high in spite of any family embarrassments.

She was married to my paternal grandfather Earnest Oliver Clayton for more than 60 years. He expected her to be a submissive wife, yet portray the image of royalty while running the household on a meager budget. Amy Jane was always ready to help anyone who needed it, as long as it didn't interfere with Grandad's dinner.

As a child, I visited only on special occasions, so I never knew her well until my adult life. I vividly remember, however, that she always fixed my favorite things to eat when I came. Every meal, she put blue cheese and date nut bread on a special saucer beside my plate. And only Grammy could make egg custard pie the way I liked it.

When she and I went downtown, Grammy slipped me a few coins from her grocery money to spend at the Murphy's 5 & 10 in Waynesburg. We always stopped at Ullom and Bailey's drugstore to get our favorite milkshake before we walked back home.

Grammy always walked or begged rides from others everywhere she went until 1958, when Pap learned to drive and got his first license. Imagine what a handicap it was all that time to depend on others to go out to eat, get groceries, or go to the doctor and dentist. But even so, it had to beat riding with Grandad. I took one ride with him and vowed to God if He let me live through it, I would never get into the car with Grandad again

During my early childhood Grammy and Grandad lived off Washington Street in a two-bedroom apartment over a garage. This was just a short walk to everything they needed. It was not until the fifties (after they aged) that Grandad built a house a mile from town at 505 Huffman Street. It isolated Grammy, but I'm not sure "The Master" hadn't planned it that way.

I visited every Christmas and other holidays but missed the fun of summer vacations at their place, due to farm work with Pap. But I finally took a wonderful vacation with them the summer I graduated from high school. They were moving to Clearwater, Florida and asked me to drive them down. We enjoyed a trip through Williamsburg, Virginia, Bellingrath Gardens and other places of interest Grammy had wanted to go all of her life. I enjoyed the trip as I drove and Pap sat in the front while "Miss Daisy" rode in the back and looked at the beautiful country she had missed. Every two miles she would say "Watch your speedometer Sweetie" and before I could answer Pap Clayton would reply "Jane, never mind about his driving, he is doing good."

Grammy was a smoker, I guess all her life, but would go into the bathroom to hide her sin when I was there. Now, I had smoked enough to know what that aroma was when I went in there but she abstained from doing it in front of me until I was an adult. She was also quite the seamstress, and every new baby had the honor of wearing a pair of her hand-knitted booties home from the hospital. If you were special, like I was you got the full-blown attire of cap, gown and

booties. Grammy started spoiling me at four days old—and I loved it.

Grammy had a very dry sense of humor but was always cheerful. One story that sticks in my mind was when we went to Warsaw, Missouri to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. We were sitting around the breakfast table on that glorious day of celebration when I leaned over to Grammy and said "Well, Grammy, fifty years ago today was the day?"

She looked at me with a little silly grin and replied "Yes, but tonight's not the night." This was the first and only time in my life I ever heard her say anything like that.

Grammy was miserable the whole time they lived in Florida and yearned to get back to Waynesburg, which they did. They moved into a little apartment on Main Street and her commitment was to live there until she died. Grandad became sick and Grammy served as nurse until his heart finally gave out and he went to be with the Lord. She tried to hold on in that little apartment. But in a few years her health failed and she went to live with my dad and Audrey in Warsaw, Missouri. She was miserable there. Audrey could make Satan miserable—especially if he lived with her. But Grammy had no choice. She could not have any quality time with my father and had to obey the house rules, which "Sarge Audrey" set for her. This proud lady lost her self-esteem and pride she carried all her life and died a lonely lady in the Clinton Nursing Home on December 20, 1983. My dad called me upon her death and asked me to travel to Pennsylvania from Florida to plan her funeral, as he was not able. I went with pride and honor and laid her to rest beside Pap. She was a great lady!

Grandad Clayton

Earnest Oliver Clayton, father of Samuel, born November 6 (year unknown) to Sam and Ellen Sanders Clayton. Died September 26, 1978 in Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.

My paternal grandfather Ernie had a lot of pride, but it certainly wasn't driven by wealth. He never earned over $10,000 a year his entire life, working for the U.S. postal service. Grandad started as a letter carrier in Waynesburg and gradually worked his way up to postmaster. He walked straight and proud, liked good cigars, and, so I was told, took a little nip when no one was watching.

He'd start his day at 6:00 AM, eating a three-course breakfast that Grammy prepared for him each morning: perfectly poached eggs, lightly buttered toast, and a *lumpless* Cream of Wheat. He allowed no milk cartons or bread wrappers on the table, and the cream for his coffee had to be at the left side of his plate.

After breakfast, Grandad checked his shirt and tie for spots (Heaven forbid!), lit up an El Verso cigar, and read the *Democrat Messenger* news from front to back. Then he went to his closet, got his black Homburg hat, placed it precisely on his head, and proudly began his "strut" to the office.

Others have told me that he was an excellent letter carrier and did it the hard way, carrying a huge leather pouch from door to door. He told me stories of how his fingers cracked

and bled in the winter from the cold and handling all that mail. After graduating from letter carrier to working inside the post office, he took his lunch break from exactly 11:30 to 1:00, always including a stop by the American Legion to see what was going on around town. When his workday ended, he headed to the Legion for a quick drink to help him make his walk home.

Grandad was a very disciplined man all of his life and expected those around him to be the same. He expected dinner at exactly 6:00 PM: meat, three vegetables, and hot rolls or bread. And they always had dessert. Sunday's meal—the same every week—was fried or baked chicken with dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, lima beans, and one other vegetable. Since Grammy knew that she had to have "The master's meal" prepared as he liked it, she reviewed each week's menu with him on Sundays.

In the summertime, Grandad would light up another El Verso after dinner and walk back downtown, where he'd loaf at the courthouse or bank until nearly dark. He was a very polite man, spoke good English, and always tipped his hat to the ladies.

Grandad had no special hobbies and couldn't even drive a car until his later years.

Grandad was a World War I veteran, wounded from mustard gas in the trenches. The deadly gas had cracked his nails down the centers, and his fingers were badly scarred and peeled. He'd never talk about his war days, but often said he'd been proud to serve his country by fighting for it. As a child, I could never understand how anyone could be proud to be injured by fighting for some cause. Now that I'm older, I understand.

My Grandfather Clayton was extremely good to me. His most common habits were scraping his nails with his pocketknife and jingling the change in his pockets. He always sharpened his knife to perfection and he'd get a new one about once a year. As I grew older, I was the beneficiary of

the used knives, the blades worn thin from sharpening.

But I never felt I really knew Grandad. I guess that came from hearing stories about him from others who didn't like him much. Funny, how people work harder at tearing down the image of others rather than building or at least protecting it. According to my father, Grandad was never affectionate with him, but rather chastised him for playing in the band instead of playing football. My father actually played trumpet to please his mother, but wouldn't tell his dad that. Grandad wouldn't even go to any of my father's school functions for fear of being embarrassed by his "sissy" son.

It was Grandad's lifelong desire to retire in Florida, and they did, against Grammy's better judgement. Many friends came to visit them from their little hometown of Waynesburg, especially in the winter months. Finally, Grammy had her belly full of all the expense and entertaining winter guests. She missed her good friends back home, and many were dying. The battle finally over, they returned to Waynesburg.

Grandad's old buddies weren't waiting for him at the courthouse wall anymore. They, too, had grown older and some were even gone. But he continued to go down for a while, just to check. Most of the time he bought just a few groceries for Grammy, made the trip to the Legion to be medicated, and then home. He died of kidney failure September 26, 1978, and was "proudly" laid to rest with military honors. Pride cometh with honor, I guess.

Mother

Marjorie Dale Orndoff Clayton Robinson

Forgive me, Mother, for not allowing you to be more a part of my life. Grant me freedom to love you now, as I should have loved you then. I hope to join you someday. Then we can talk about the things we never discussed. Maybe we can even include Dad.

I know very little about my mother's childhood. Ironically, she was raised in the same home as her father, and me. If I'd known more about her earlier years perhaps, it would have helped me untangle the knots of my own life. I can only guess she was nurtured in love. Pap and Granny would have given to her as they did me. Growing up during the depression, she also undoubtedly lived a simple life and made do with what she had.

I have a few vivid memories. Even though I didn't live with Mother, she came to visit, occasionally. I venture to say she mothered me to the degree that Pap permitted, as he'd never approved of her divorcing my father. She told me stories about how Pap had fought the divorce and warned her of the consequences if she followed through. As Pap fulfilled his warning, she suffered in many ways.

Mom's survival technique after the divorce was to go back into the workforce. She'd not only lost a marriage. She'd also lost the trust—and possibly even the love—of her father, too. I'm certain her decision to leave me "waiting on the wall" was

driven partially by the threat of what would happen if she tried to take me. Even now, it's hard to piece together exactly what happened, but I'm willing to give her every benefit of the doubt. I know how Pap operated.

Mother briefly reappeared in my life when I was six. She came back home for a short while after her second marriage, pregnant with David Bruce. She and Bob Robinson had separated.

Although I knew nothing of her problems or what "pregnant" even meant, I do remember her knitting something. When I asked her what it was, she answered "These are booties for your brother or sister."

Brother? Sister? My first thought was that Granny was going to have a baby. She was the only mother I'd really known, and if I was getting a brother or sister, she had to be the source. It was soon explained and although I didn't fully understand, I knew I was expected to act excited.

Mother was struggling with her marriage, pregnant, and not getting much more than a roof over her head. But she and I spent some quality time together. But just when I was getting comfortable with having her there, her husband came to make amends and take her back, like a knight in shining armor. For the second time in my life, my birth mother abandoned me, to my utter confusion. Not only did this man take my mother from me, but I learned to dislike him from the terrible things I heard my grandfather say to him. He, like my mother, never gained Pap's approval as the replacement for my birth father, Sam Clayton. I remember one disagreement over her second marriage when Pap said sarcastically, "Marjorie, Sam Clayton's butt would make Bob Robinson a good Sunday face!" Pap never minced words or even kept them clean, for that matter.

Mother's life improved somewhat over the years, but she struggled for Pap's acceptance even though she felt she would never receive it. I used Pap's disapproval to justify Mother's absence in my life and grew tired of trying to make excuses

to my little friends as to why she left.

I don't think Mother was a happy person in her marital situation, but she made the best of it. And I later learned that she had been a great homemaker and mother to her three other children.

Mother was not one to share her heart, especially since it had been broken many times. She expressed love in many ways, but had a tendency to substitute monetary things for true emotion. I didn't want knitted socks, fruitcakes, or homemade rolls. I wanted her to embrace me, in spite of life's circumstances. I wanted her to be there when I needed her and to take me with her. How could a mother turn her back on her child?

I guess it certainly could have been worse. I could have ended up in a dumpster or on an abortionist's table. I can at least praise my mother for my birth and choosing to keep me in her womb.

Five years before her death, Mother and Poppy developed a relationship with my family and me. They liked coming to Florida (why not) and probably would have settled there had Mother not become ill. We built on the mother/son thing during their visits, but admittedly, she couldn't pierce the armor I had worn since childhood. I only wish she'd been honest with me and explained the reason for her divorce from my father. I already knew the reason for the marriage: It was me.

In the fall of '82, Mother became ill and lived only 11 weeks after being diagnosed with liver cancer. She'd raised her family, seen her only daughter married, and been blessed with grandchildren. It was time to go Home.

She was welcomed to Heaven on December 21,1982, and we laid her to rest on the eve of our Lord's birth, December 24.

In my adult years, Mother told me that she'd really wanted to take me with her and her family when I was young. But her spouse resisted. He'd said, "We have all we can handle to raise the ones we already have. Just leave him where he is."

Nan and I later took in this same man—Pop Robinson—and gave him a home after my mother died and he'd failed in another brief marriage. He was down on his luck with no place to go. Instead of "leaving him where he was," we took him into our home. Maybe God used this to prepare me for something.

My Dad

I rubbed his arm and said, "Dad, I'm here." He opened one eye and, with a little smile and a deep breath, went to be with the Lord. After all the years I'd waited on the wall for him, he waited one last time for me.

Samuel Sumner Clayton, father of Harry Clayton, son of Earnest and Amy Jane Clayton. My father, God rest his soul. Did I know him? Only by name and an occasional visit in the early years of my life and later by my own initiative as an adult.

He married my mother as the gentlemanly thing to do. Soon he was deprived the privilege of sharing his life with me, due to the pride of his father and the selfishness of my mother.

I was told Sam Clayton was a compassionate man. He had musical ability, went to dancing school, and played in concerts. But none of those qualified him as acceptable in his father's book of values. His teenage years were Spartan; his parents didn't have the means to give him the luxuries of life. I doubt my father enjoyed his childhood even as much as I did. He had to strive constantly for his father's love and acceptance. I didn't, simply because Dad wasn't there.

Dad chose the military as his career because Grandad said it was the manly thing to do. Actually, it took him from Waynesburg and away from home. Dad spent 25 years with the Army and must have been a good soldier. He advanced to

Captain. He also received two Bronze Stars, a Purple Heart, and other medals of honor, though he never talked about them. He spent time in a World War II concentration camp and finally was released to an Army hospital to recuperate. He called home to let my grandparents know where and how he was, only to have Grandad say, "What happened to you? Did you get VD?" Dad told me this story in 1988, as we sat beside a lake mending our relationship. He also shared that he disliked his father from that day forward.

I was about six years old when Dad had married Audrey Rogers, a lady he'd met on Guam. I didn't meet her until his visit to Greene County two years later. I wasn't impressed with her and had no inclination to be, as she was the person who shared my father's life. They seemed happy, although she was very possessive of Dad. So, I expressed my hurt through indifference.

After Dad retired from the military, he tried to find his way as a civilian. It was a significant adjustment after living under his father's control and then 25 years of military discipline. He knew nothing about business and hadn't learned a trade, yet had to bring in an income. Their family lifestyle didn't match his retirement pay. He and Audrey had no children, but they loved to travel and enjoy life, I could not fit in.

When I began having problems in my adult life, Dad did not approve of what I was doing. But I couldn't have cared less. I never had his advice or concern when I was growing up. I surely didn't think I needed it at that time. We were estranged, but that was no big deal. We'd been estranged all of my life. My decisions alienated us for several years, until we finally put our problems to rest. We both felt it was time to call a truce and try to develop a relationship.

We met for a weekend at Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1988. Nancy, Audrey, and Kelley occupied themselves while Dad and I sat by the lake and reminisced. He told me about his problems in life but offered no excuses for abandoning me. When I asked, he implied his father and Pap Orndoff inter

fered in his marriage to my mother, and she wanted the divorce. I accepted his explanation. It fit what I already knew to be true. He told me that day that he'd deeply loved my mother when he married her, even under the circumstances. He also asked me to promise him that if anything should happen to him, I'd care for Audrey. When I agreed I would, he looked at me with a grin and said, "I've just left you with a chore."

That December, Dad had a heart attack and I was called to his bedside. I flew from Dallas to Kansas City, praying as I went for God to spare him at least until I could get there. From the airport, I drove about 200 miles south to the hospital in Clinton, Missouri. As I ran upstairs, Audrey greeted me, "He's waiting for you. I told him you were coming."

I went to Dad's side. His eyes were closed, his breathing shallow and fast. I rubbed his arm and said, "Dad, I'm here." He opened one eye and, with a little smile and a deep sigh, went to be with the Lord. Thank you, dear God, for letting him live until I arrived. After all the years I'd waited on the wall for him, he waited one last time for me.

Note: Audrey lived until February 26, 1997. Nancy and I cared for her the last three years of her life until she succumbed to Alzheimer's. Gran-Gran (the kids called her) had lost all awareness, including her memories of Dad.

Mom Merryman

I don't advocate blonde jokes, since I have daughters who are blonde. I don't tell or entertain cruel mother-in-law jokes, either. I can't relate to them. I have an unusual marriage, with a best friend for a wife and a "Mom" for a mother-in-law.

I earlier shared my experience of being raised without a mother. While Granny filled the gap of motherhood as best she could, the one who birthed and nursed me was not a permanent figure in my life. I've carried this deep hurt since I was old enough to know what inner pain means. But the same lady who nurtured, nursed and bathed my wife in love has helped me overcome this lack in my life.

Florence Merryman, my mother-in law, has become the mother I never had. She has loved me unconditionally, stood beside me in times of sorrow, and is always there when I need her. "Mom" is far more Velcro than Teflon. I can laugh with her, and I can cry with her. I feel equally comfortable telling her jokes—even those slightly off color—or praying with her.

This lady is one of the best cooks in the world, quilts to perfection, and does everything with love. I'm sure there have been times when we didn't agree, yet we've never crossed words. I'll always respect her, no matter what the circumstance, and I'll be there for her as she's been for me.

I love you "Honk" (don't ask), from the bottom of my heart. You once said, "You're the son you I never had." Thanks, Mom. You're a fantastic mother!

The Gentleman from Samtown

T.J.

> I hope I shall always possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider to be the most enviable of all titles: the character of an "Honest Man."
>
> —GEORGE WASHINGTON

Thomas Jefferson Merryman, has gone by T.J. all his life (and by J.J. with the grandkids). But I am privileged to call him "Dad". He's a man who's worked his entire life with his word as his bond. Even bankers needed only a handshake to complete a deal with him. That same trust still stands today. He's been married to the same wonderful woman for over six decades, and rarely misses a Sunday at church.

To know him is to love him and that I do. My first visit to his home to meet the parents was a little difficult. Anyone who'd plowed with mules, chopped cotton, milked cows, and ran an egg farm in his early years had to be a giant of man with muscles like Popeye. His hand felt like a ham of meat when I grasped it for our first handshake. But although he was no stranger to hard work, he wasn't anything like I expected.

We exchanged small talk in the family room as the women prepared lunch. I was a bit uncomfortable being one-on-one

with him, as Nancy had warned me of her parents' uneasiness about me.

Dad wasn't hard to get acquainted with, although I did undergo his close scrutiny. He wasn't about to sit passively and trust just anyone with his baby daughter and his precious granddaughters. I understood his position. He was from the old school where divorce was a sin and all divorced men of the same character. If I wanted to be a part of that family, I'd have to gain the trust of both him and Nancy's mom. Although that was my plan, I wasn't about to say so on this visit. I might have been born at night, but it wasn't last night.

I respected Dad from the very beginning. He was very transparent about his education, his years of labor, his family, and—oh yes—politics. He didn't try to impress me with his accomplishments, nor question mine, except for asking, "What ya do for a livin'?" (And that was a fair question to ask someone who someday might have responsibility for his offspring.)

I held my breath in fear of his asking me where I went to church. I hadn't darkened the door of a church for quite some time. It had been a long time since Mt. Zion Church and Granny's off-key singing.

My next worry was whether they'd call on me to ask the blessing over dinner. But Nancy's mother did the prayer, and the feast began. Other than the lumps in my throat and avoiding what I thought were black-eyed peas, the meal and the rest of that fateful day were quite enjoyable.

Since our courtship was short, I didn't have much time to get to know Dad well before I became his son-in-law. But he gave me his permission to marry his daughter and entrusted me with his granddaughters, which meant a lot.

We made several visits from St. Louis to Newbern the first year. Both Nancy and the girls needed the homey atmosphere that St. Louis wasn't providing. Dad and I built a relationship as I gained his trust. He was willing to let me into his life, and I shared mine with him. Dad is a man of integrity. For the first

time in my 38 years, I'd met someone who didn't set unreachable standards of achievement. He measured me by my actions, not my wealth. And even though I'd failed, he considered me still salvageable.

Dad and I have had a great relationship. The older we get, the more we appreciate that bond. I've learned so much from him and treasure the good times we share. He's always been there for me, no matter what. He's come along beside me in times of illness, shared my grief, and been my friend in every circumstance. No trip was ever too long or time too valuable to spend on our family's needs.

I hope I've not disappointed you, Dad. You've accepted me as your son, just as you've been the Dad I never had. I love you, buddy!

Kids...Kids...Kids...Kids

Hebrews 2:13
And again "I will put my trust in Him." And again He says, "Here I am with the children God has given me."

This chapter is about my children, for my children, and dedicated to my children. Yes, I have put my trust in Him and He has blessed me in many ways. But none are more precious to me than my children. Each new addition only expanded the size of my heart.

Each one is uniquely wired. For example, if you wanted to build a new house, Kelley would get you the best deal on materials; Mike would measure them all with a micrometer; Dixie would color them with a grease pencil; and Wendy would cut them with an axe. These are our young'ns.

Michael Dane Clayton
May 5, 1961

Husband of Julia (Zervos) Clayton since October 8, 1989. Father of Corinne Elizabeth (January 14, 1991) and Brady Michael Allen (September 20, 1999).

Michael was trademarked early in life with a "pineapple haircut." Although that same hair now shows a few lines of gray, even 40 years can't erase his mischieveous mannerisms. Mike was a special blessing to Betty Ruth and me, especially after losing his brother two years before.

Mike was very inquisitive and busy all the time. If there was something for him to get into, he was quick to spot it. He never stopped, from sunrise until late evening. He liked motorcycle rides, dogs, and jeans. Dirt was his favorite plaything, and he loved tinkering with *everything*.

One of my favorite stories of Mike happened in Lima, Ohio. I'd just bought a new Honda motorcycle and Mike loved riding on the back with me. This was about the time we were potty training him, so we made a deal. Every night when I came home from work, I'd take him for a ride provided he hadn't wet the bed the night before. He was the first to tell me when I got home if he qualified for a ride.

One Friday, we left for a weekend camping trip when a middle-aged couple passed on a motorcycle. Mike looked at them whiz by and said soberly, "I guess she didn't pee the bed last night, did she Dad?" We laughed and laughed, though Mike had no idea what was so funny.

Mike was in his glory when we moved from Ohio back to Pine Bank. He loved living in the country and having good friends like Henry Roberts, a little guy who lived up the road. We still kid in the family about "knowing Henry." To hear us talk, you'd think it was Henry Kissinger or some other person of equal fame. These guys fished all the streams far and near and hunted coon in about every woods around. They had no

fear of darkness.

Billy Walls was another good friend of Mike's. When the three of them got together, it reminded me of one of Pap Orndoff's sayings:

> *One boy is a boy, two boys are a half of a boy and three boys are no boy at all!*

He and his buddies worked on their bikes a lot, even if they weren't broken. But Mike's first motorbike was a disaster. It never ran. Just when we felt we had one thing licked, something else went wrong.

Mike inherited a natural talent for music from his mother. There wasn't an instrument Betty couldn't play well. She also taught Mike. He became quite a drummer and could also find his way around a banjo pretty good. As an adult, he'll often pick on his guitar and hum a few bars of an old song for his kids.

Mike's first car was a Chevy Nova that we called Old Thunder, for obvious reasons. As my life took a different direction, I sadly missed much of the fun and excitement of seeing my son grow up. He'd visit me in the summer and I'd visit him and Dixie in Pine Bank from time to time. But it certainly wasn't the same as being a daily part of their lives.

The years went by and Mike married. A glorious thing happened when he and his wife relocated to Texas, where Nan and I lived. This gave us a new start after a long bumpy road apart. He and Julie lived with us until they leased an apartment. Although we've both moved quite a bit since and miles separate us, our hearts are joined.

This guy is now a chip off the old block, if you know what I mean. Our voices and mannerisms are similar, he's a craftsman and skillful hunter, and we've shared similar life experiences. Unlike me, Mike is very conservative in making decisions—tomorrow will be just fine, thank you very much. He learns from listening and offers advice only when asked. Mike's philosophy has always been "I'm ok, you're ok."

His favorite time of the day is sunup, with a fresh cup of coffee in hand. He's very compassionate with his wife and children. Just the sound of their voices brings a little grin to his mouth and a glow in his eyes. His family is his treasure. Many times, I've seen him play games and read stories when I'm sure he'd rather be watching *The Outdoor Show* or reading a *Field and Stream* magazine.

I love you very much son, and please forgive me for the times I have fallen short and failed to be there for you when you needed me most. You've done so much to improve your life. We're very proud of you for it. Keep that pleasant spirit, love for your family, and your love for God.

Julie, thanks for being such a wonderful wife and mother for our son. You have been like a daughter to both Nan and me. I'll never forget the time you salvaged the answering machine from our trash and returned it to Home Depot for a refund. We also appreciate all the pictures and memories of our grandchildren you send so we can keep in touch. Thanks sweet daughter, for all things mentioned, and forgive me for those I have forgotten. You are very precious.

Dixie Lynn Clayton Smith
June 24, 1963

Became the wife of Thomas Scott Smith on November 9,1995 and the devoted mother of Michael Scott(July 17, 1996).

Dixie is a wonderful mother, and she has a heart as big as she is. As a little girl, she wore pigtails and a smile, and she always had her "giggle box upset" playing with her friends. Making friends was never hard for Dixie, and she had many. But she usually singled out someone special to be her very best friend, such as Crystal.

Dixie was a very lovable child, and some things never change. She'd spend hours making mud pies, or dressing up her babies. When we lived in Pine Bank, little girls were scarce, so she spent many hours entertaining herself. She became quite a housekeeper at a young age and helped her mother with the household chores and cleaning. She was a gourmet cook as a teenager and still knows her way around the kitchen. Kelley, our youngest, says there's nothing greater than Dix's french fries. And an Italian chef couldn't surpass Dixie's spaghetti.

One of my fondest memories is Dixie visiting Nan, Kelly and me in Texas and taking vacations with us. The girls had so much fun you'd think they'd been raised together. The saddest moments were when she left for Pine Bank, feeling uncertain about what she wanted to do in her life. But this is all water over the dam. After Dixie moved to Texas to make her home, I got to walk her down the aisle to join the man of her dreams. Now they walk hand in hand to pursue their plans for life together.

Dixie's husband and son are the center of her life. Nothing pleases her more than caring for them. Her son Michael is her buddy. They share many close conversations in the car and evenings while Dad is working.

We all treasure one story about Michael and their "buddy system". For a time, Michael didn't want to eat his dinner, so when his dad called from work to check on them he'd ask, "Michael, did you eat your dinner tonight?" If Michael answered no, then his dad would tell him he couldn't have a bottle at bedtime.

One evening when Michael had to go to bed without a bottle, he pulled an unhappy face, looked at his mother and said, "Mom, you're going to have to help me out here." You can guess who won.

Dixie also can hit a softball farther than most men and run like a deer after she does. When Michael became involved in T-Ball, I'm quite sure he got some coaching from his mom. Dixie's many talents range from prescribing care for one of her patients, to sewing up an injured fighting rooster. As well as raising her son, she's raised baby chicks, little puppies, stray cats, and goldfish.

Dixie Doodle (as some call her) likes funky shoes, wild colors, picnics, and cuddling. She also loves four wheelers, motorcycles, and the Dollar Store. "The Rag" tabloid holds her interest from cover to cover, and she relaxes with the Sunday paper after working hard each week at the clinic. Christmas is her favorite time of the year, but anytime is a good time for a big dinner. She can always find room for shrimp, steak, and sour cream cake. When we plan a family dinner, Dixie is the first to ask, "What can I bring?'

Doodle never says, "Me first." In fact, worry for others often plagues her. Dixie was only nine when her mother and I divorced. Through the years, she often served as father and mother, as well as sister, to Mike. The two developed a strong bond, each depending on the other.

As the years went by, we were able to bond again and I'm so thankful for her understanding—a precious little girl who to this day sits on my lap and never fails to give me a kiss when she arrives, and another as she leaves.

Dear God, thank You for giving me such a precious

daughter to love. Thanks for the cute smile, the pigtails, the grass-stained knees, her warm hugs and soft touch, and her heart of gold. Keep her in Your care and love and grant her the same love from her child that she has given to me. I love you, Doodle.

My son-in-law "Smitty" provides so well for my daughter and grandson. I'll never forget all the hours he spent by my side building the Happy "C" Ranch or the many miles hauling hay, with our buddy Dame riding shotgun. We've had many good times hunting, eating at Little Orky's, and just poking fun at each other.

I love you, son. Thanks for sticking by Pap and for all the effort you put into turning your life around and being a good father and husband. You've come a long way, buddy!

Wendy Deeann Clayton Kluk
May 29, 1967

Became the wife of Stephen Kluk on April 4, 1987; the mother of two sons, Tyler Mitchell (April 17, 1991) and Ryan Allen (July 13, 1995) and one daughter, Leeann Renee (February 24, 1999).

Since Wendy was born in 1967 and Nan and I weren't married until 1978, the math could be a little confusing. I'll explain again. When Nancy and I were married, she had two beautiful girls, Wendy Deeann Wood and Jennifer Kelley Wood. I was blessed to adopt these girls as daughters on May 2, 1983. They became Wendy Deeann and Kelley Clayton, daughters of Harry A. and Nancy M. Clayton.

Einstein couldn't have been more inquisitive, nor Job more patient than Wendy. She's best described as the little engine that could, but only at her own speed and timing. We laughed so many times when she came running—shoes and socks in hand—as we backed the car out of the garage to leave for church.

Wendy is a study in contradictions. When it comes to the arts, she has the motor skills of a brain surgeon coupled with the intuition of a Mozart or Michelangelo. She could make a masterpiece from two short pieces of string. She is as tenacious as a mother tiger, but as gentle as a kitten. As a small child, she exerted her strong will by holding her eyes open with her fingers to avoid going to sleep. As a mom, she'll spend more time repairing one of her children's toys than I would throwing it away and going to Toys R Us to replace it.

Wendy showed her love and affection by writing a sweet note or even a poem when someone was ill. We've kidded her about her teen years, but in truth she was just a typical teenager. Back then, we weren't too sure what that meant, but we learned fast.

Friends were never a problem for Wendy, and she always

picked good ones. Scripture says iron sharpens iron, and Wendy's school friends proved to be good models for one another. She loved to talk for hours on the phone (some things never change), decorate her room with artwork, and store everything from apple cores to dirty bras under her bed. I always threatened to make a sign that read "*Disaster Zone*" for the door to her room. She'd only clean it after ten warnings. When she saw me coming her direction with a trash bag, she'd exclaim, "I'll do it right now, Dad." Believe it or not, those were good years and good memories.

Athletics were high on her skills and she could throw a shot put or discus as far as an Olympic finalist (well, almost as far). She'd practice until her little cheeks were as red as beets, then work even harder. She was determined to be the best.

Then came the day she preferred Ken to Barbie. You could hear her in her room, talking to her girlfriends and giggling about the day's events at school. It was the typical "He said, then she said" scenario. Plus, "Do you think he likes me?' or "Did he say anything about me?" The line I always liked best was, "I *think* I saw him look at me today."

Her first date (at least we thought it was her first) was a boy named Randy. The time came for the great event, the door bell rang, and there stood a tall, skinny guy with slicked hair, shaking like a leaf. I invited him in and when he sat down, his knees knocked together like a drum. We managed some small talk until my daughter—who"only yesterday" played with baby dolls—came into the room, transformed into a beautiful young woman.

Banana pudding, chicken and dumplings, ice cream and garage sales are among her likes; David Letterman, liver and onions, and clocks are among her dislikes. Cooking, mending, and yard work share the same category as zits, root canals, and tomorrow's chores. Going to Wal-Mart at midnight after the kids and Steve are safely in bed is a common practice. And the best time to wrap Christmas gifts is one hour before we open them, so the paper doesn't go out of style.

Wendy's been so much fun, it pleases us greatly to see how she's matured into a wonderful mother and wife. She always sets aside special time for her children and holidays revolve around them. On their birthdays, she goes all out to make them feel special. She's a good shopper and her kids are dressed impeccably. For a child who asked for little, she has given much.

Children have always been special in Wendy's medical practice. Recently she cared for a seven-year-old girl suffering from a spinal defect and paralyzed from the waist down. She cared for that child like a mother as well as a nurse. When little Megan died in surgery, Wendy suffered her loss like a mother. My only word of comfort to her was, "Honey, you probably brought some special sunshine into Megan's life that no one else did. Be thankful she can now walk and live a wonderful life in Heaven."

Wendy darling, thanks for all the good memories you have given us. Thanks for many ways you've expressed your love and for giving me the opportunity to be your dad. I love you, Punkin.

Wendy's husband, Steve Kluk, has been a great son also. The only time Steve ever says "no" to work is when you ask him if he has had enough. He coaches his boys' ball teams, kisses our granddaughter frequently, and gives Wendy anything she wants. He treats Nan and I with much respect and is always there when we need him. It is so good to know we have a son like Steve who believes discipline should be done in love. Thanks, Steve, for coming into our family.

Kelley Clayton Massey
April 20, 1974

Born Jennifer Kelley Wood and on May 2, 1983 became my loving daughter by adoption as Kelley Clayton. Married Grady Massey on October 17, 1998.

Here's a child with all the attraction of Velcro. This little darling is variously called Jennifer, KK, Princess, Mud Hole, and Nerd, all names applied in love over the years. But *my* favorite name for her is daughter.

When Kelley came into my life, she was still in diapers at night, with long blonde hair and a smile that'd win the heart of King Kong. On my second date with Nancy, I went to Memphis to meet the kids and took them to dinner with us. We went to a cafeteria and Kelley picked out all the things kids like, such as Jello, sweets, and for some odd reason, fried okra. We had finished our meal and I noticed she hadn't eaten her okra. When I asked why, she looked at me with a smile and said, "'Cause I got *this* for you," shoving the okra my way.

Kelley is an entrepreneur. She first gained the title as a young girl by making hair bows and selling them to her classmates. Later, she took quarters to summer camp as spending money then sold them three for a buck for the vending machines. Since kids couldn't get them anywhere else, she had a corner on the market. Free enterprise rules again.

Kelley is highly organized in everything she does. She sends birthday and greeting cards a week early and starts her Christmas shopping and wrapping before Halloween. She manages her own business, *Another Season,* which she bought from her mother three years ago. She's also her mother's daughter in her way of caring, sharing, and loving people but her dad's daughter in her spunk, determination, and lack of patience. (Funny I'd notice that, huh?)

Her favorite foods include hamburgers (to die for Kitoks),

Mexican food, and french fries. Coke is a staple of life and sweets such as candy and cookies a daily requirement. She can still wolf down a Big Mac, but likes to go out for a nice steak dinner. Excuse my gloating, but nothing pleases me more than to go out for a steak dinner with her and have her say, "Dad, will you cut my steak up for me?" The only words that could please me more are God's affirmation at the end of my life, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter the gates of Heaven."

There are so many stories from Kelley's childhood, it would take another book to tell them all. One I'm particularly fond of occurred shortly after Nancy and I were married. We were shopping one Saturday afternoon and were trying to cross the street when I said, "Jennifer give me your hand."

Well, being the little independent thing she was, she did not do it. So I reached down and took her hand firmly. She looked up at me with a frown and said, "Well, you didn't have to jerk it!" Another memory in the life of her dad.

Junior High School was soon upon us. This time, we had experience under our belts from Wendy. Needless to say, our prayer life increased seeing both girls thorough their adolescent years. As they headed into puberty, Nancy and I were going into midlife. Kelley was battling hormones on her way up, and her mother was battling them on the way down.

Kelley too was athletic. We spent many hours at the softball and soccer field. In fact, we made some of our best friends through her sports. She was a star catcher. Her batting style was "hit 'em hard and far," and when she did, she'd run like a shot. She was never one to take any guff from opposition. (Must've been her dad coming out again in the guff area.)

Nancy and I survived Kelley's high school years with only one blown engine, one wreck, and ??? speeding tickets. Now the real challenge came: college. This experience taught me one thing. Not all kids are college material—especially if they don't want to be. But Kelley did the best she could, and we were proud of her. Kelley's always been an achiever. She'll get

where she wants to be, in the fashion she wants to get there. To Kelley, past failures are only opportunities to learn.

Kelley and I shared many things together: hunting, garage sales, car shopping, tale swapping, crying times, and trying times. From paved roads to mud holes, speeding tickets to plane tickets. From a goodnight kiss as I tucked her into bed to a goodbye kiss as I walked her down the aisle. Always remember honey, you are special.

Kelley married Grady Massey, who has found his limb in our family tree as well. Grady is kind, gentle, and treats our "Princess" just as her name suggests. I love hunting with Grady and gun shopping at all the local shops. He's become quite the handy man since he and KK bought their home. He'll tackle any home improvement job with the help of a Home Depot salesman and a phone call to Pap. Keep up the good work at your job, partner. You'll find yourself up the ladder in no time. Thanks for being a good husband to our daughter.

In closing, I want to say that I hope each of you enjoy your families as much as I have enjoyed you. Love your spouse as I love your Mom. Treat them as though they are your best friend, just as Nan is to me. Make Christ the center of your life, not just the outer circle. Remember material things become just stuff. Life's true rewards are love, affection, truth, and integrity.

Of all the things I have gained in my life, forgiveness by my Lord Jesus Christ is the best and my family is second. Without the first I would never have grown to appreciate the second.

III Generations

One of the things I've learned over the years is that if you pursue happiness, it will elude you. But if you focus on your family, the needs of others, your work, meeting new people, and doing the very best you can, happiness will find you. Let me tell you about my grandchildren.

I like to say I have a six-pack now, but room for more. The good Lord has blessed me with two precious little girls and four active boys. Now these grandkids or munchkins as we call them are not just the run of the mill little rascals with pretty hair bows and skinned knees, these are good stock.

Corinne is the oldest, Tyler is right behind her, Ryan came our way four years later, followed by Michael, and in three years Leeann came on the scene and then Brady brought up the rear. In case this genealogy got ahead of you, I'll explain a little better.

Name	Nickname	Born	Parents
Corinne Elizabeth	Punky	Jan. 14, 1991	Mike & Julie **Clayton**
Tyler Mitchell	Big Guy	April 17, 1991	Steve & Wendy **Kluk**
Ryan Allen	RA	July 13, 1995	Steve & Wendy **Kluk**
Michael Scott	Bub	July 17, 1996	Scott & Dixie **Smith**
Leeann Renee	Little Bit	Feb. 24,1999	Steve & Wendy **Kluk**
Brady Michael Allen,	Spark Plug	Sept. 20, 1999	Mike & Julie **Clayton**

There's room in the chart for more names. As the good

Lord brings them, we will love them. We *do* have a mixture. I don't think any two of them have the same features or disposition. But one thing they all have in common is that their grandmother and I love them equally. We became "Pap" and "Nan" when Corinne came on the scene, and the handles stuck—even with our children. When my name was lengthened to "Pappy," (according to Michael) it spread to most everyone who knows me—family, workmates, and even clients.

Corinne was born just as the Gulf War was breaking out and I shall never forget that cold January night. Julie had been in the hospital for a few weeks with complications, but we felt the time was near. We gathered at Parkland Hospital in Dallas for the festivities and were told by the doctor upon examining her it could be six or eight hours. I went into the labor room to see Julie and holding back the tears she said, "Pap, pray for me so I don't have to hurt and bring my baby now." I had a pretty good prayer life but I wasn't sure my prayers were that powerful. I held Julie's hand and we prayed and we cried and we hugged and we prayed some more. The pain was getting worse, and I was wanting to get out of there, but she was wanting me to stay. I finally got out the door and returned to the waiting room to be with Nan. Shortly, Dixie came running into the room and said, "We have a baby girl!" My prayers had been heard. The delivery was so fast that the doctor didn't even have a chance to get back. The nurse delivered Corinne. In a few minutes, Mike—with tears in his eyes—proudly carried this new bundle of joy to share with us. I looked at his precious little girl, thanked God and shed tears of joy and thanksgiving.

Corinne has grown to be an avid reader and a Barbie collector. Her latest thing is turkey hunting with her dad. This is

her first year behind a shotgun. She gets up at the wee hours of morning to get all decked out in her camouflage outfit and hits the woods to test her skills at calling the old tom turkeys. Her dad says she gets restless and catches a few zzzz's once in awhile. We love you, honey, and think you are a fine young lady.

Springtime arrived, and the bees were swarming around the Kluk house when Sir Tyler was due to arrive. Wendy was more than ready for him as she had what seemed like a fifteen-month pregnancy. Why is it these young'ns want to be born at odd times of the day? Wendy had as usual gone to do some shopping and, whoosh, here came the water. Off they went to Hillcrest Hospital. Nan and I drove from Dallas as fast as the law allowed. Another daughter was hurting and begging for relief. Out came the prayer cloth again and together we asked God to ease the pain and bless us again as He had four months earlier.

After some time, the doctor determined that Tyler was lodged in the birth canal. They needed to perform a Cesarean section. The hospital staff whisked Wendy off to the delivery room with "Dr." Steve Kluk bringing up the rear in his blue gown. Now, those of you who know Steven realize that he is a wood craftsman, not an obstetrician.

We were right outside the door patiently awaiting the arrival of Sir Tyler when we heard a baby cry. Nan looked at me with an anxious "Nanny" look, then her eyes begin to sparkle. He was here. Tyler Kluk had made the scene. Moments later here came Dr. Steve in his blue gown and work shoes carrying our first grandson to greet his awaiting crowd. He was crying, he was red, he was wrinkled, and he was still messy. But we said "Oh my, what a pretty baby!"

We greeted young Mr. Kluk, and Steve took him back to

the mommy quarters so they could finish the clean up job. They brought Wendy to her room, and as soon as I could visit her, I went in. There is something very special about being with your daughter right after she birthed your grandchild. She asked, "Dad, what does he look like?"

I immediately erased all the old tapes in my mind about the red, wrinkled, messy, little guy and replied, "He has his daddy's eyes, your mouth, and Pap's double chin. Wendy looked at me and smiled. As tears ran down both our cheeks, we joined hands and I thanked God for another blessing.

Young Tyler has grown and matured to a young man. He excels in baseball, basketball, and loved going to the ranch with Pap. We would no more than hit the pasture until he was on my lap, blowing the horn to get the cows to come for their treat of range cubes. He was especially fascinated with the Hereford bull that he called "Bully."

When we went among the cows in the pasture on the four wheeler, Tyler stayed close to Pap. He was a bit F-R-A-I-D, as we call it. He didn't take any chances of those old cows using him for a backstop. As I worked, he worked, doing whatever he could to get the dirtiest. Nan bought him some gloves (he called them "glubs") so he could be like Pap and wear them when he worked.

We don't see our little Tyler, as much as we would like—or any of the grandchildren, for that matter. He had a nasty bout with meningitis last year and had us all on our knees praying for his recovery. Not only did we pray but, we had prayer chains going from coast to coast. I think we all have a different perspective on life since then.

Tyler, buddy, we love you. I'm counting the days until we can go fishing, play ball, and do other things that grandfathers are supposed to do with their grandsons. Who knows? We might even get us a few little calves to feed again.

Ryan Allen and Michael were born when I was out of state. I go to the Christian Booksellers convention every July and—wouldn't you know—these little guys were born while I was there both in '95 and '96. Their mothers got on my case about being at CBA when the grandsons were born. I told them since CBA was the same time every year, it looked to me like they needed to work on their timing.

I don't have any of the waiting room drama to share about these births. When Ryan was born, we knew he was to be a Caesarian birth. The game plan was for Nan to call me when he was born. Well, the call came: all was well. Nan faxed a Polaroid to the hotel for me. As I waited for the picture, I shared the good news with the ladies working behind the counter. They were as excited as I was when we heard the fax machine kick off, and they huddled around it to catch a first glimpse. I heard the *ooohs* and *aaaahs* as they brought the picture to me with a funny look on their faces. When I saw the picture I knew why. You can't fax a Polaroid picture. It comes out black. I started laughing and assured them our little guy was not born black. Nan sent me another picture by Federal Express to clear up the mystery.

Both of these guys have grown to be quite the ball players. Ryan was more attracted to a ball than he was a bottle. He would roll, pitch, knock, throw, and even tried to swallow one as a toddler. Made no difference what kind of ball, he was ready to play. He is now a star player on his hometown team and has the special privilege of his daddy being his coach. Michael started T-Ball this year. He came home the first day and told his mother he thought it was cheating to put the ball on that stick to hit it. He also told his mother in some ballgame language how hard the _ _ _ _ ball was to hit. (Must have learned that at day school.) Michael loves helping his dad in the chicken yard, fishing, and watching Scooby Doo. Ryan stays occupied by wrestling, playing Game Boy, and watching cartoons. I am so proud of these little guys. They are both very

active and like to have fun. Each of them have the kindness of Nan.

Since I could not be there when God blessed us with these two little ones, I went to see them as fast as I could when I returned home. Although I missed the rosy cheeks and the excitement of childbirth, they looked like little angels to me upon first sight. When I walked into Dixie's room, her mother Betty was sitting on the sofa beside the bed. Nan sat beside her holding baby Michael. I never have been in that situation before. Although it seemed a little awkward, I carefully kissed and congratulated first one, then the other. Michael slept without a worry in the world, beautiful as the Gerber baby and about as plump.

Ryan already had "unwrinkled" and seemed to be half grown before I was able to see him. That chap was ready for the ball field on his second day here. Both my daughters were proud to show their Dad what they had done in my absence. Tears of joy filled my eyes as I greeted them and told them how much I loved them.

Now lets move on to number five, "Miss Priss". We traveled to Rogers, Arkansas for another Cesarean section and to help with two excited brothers who were not sure they had ordered a baby sister. Steve, Wendy, Nan, and I made our way to the hospital with the boys. The hospital staff started doing all the things they do to daddy's daughters before they birth their babies. We tried to occupy the boys as best we could, but some of the questions they asked and the gyrations they went through were pretty testy for Pappy. So, Nan in her calm and collected way handled it. The time came for me to see my daughter, pray with her, kiss her forehead, and say, "I love you honey," before they wheeled her away. Then I went to the prayer room alone. I felt anxious, and knew prayer was the only answer.

Wendy had been gone about twenty minutes when we heard "Respiratory therapy to the delivery room STAT." Nan and I both heard it and knew our daughter was the only one in delivery. The worst part was seeing nurses and doctors coming from every direction on a dead run as they heard the words. Now I knew why I had gone to the prayer room earlier and would have gone again, but I needed to be with Nan and the boys. We tried to shield the boys, but they began asking questions about their mommy and baby sister. Soon, Steven came out from the delivery room with tears in his eyes. He said, "The baby had some problems in birthing and is struggling to breath." I had to be strong for them, but I hurt in my heart as I had never hurt before. I couldn't respond, other than to beg God for His intervention and mercy.

We took the boys and slowly walked to ICU where we peeped through the blinds to catch a glimpse of a team of doctors and nurses fighting to keep a baby alive—our granddaughter. As we watched and tried to explain the situation and comfort the boys, a Catholic nun came to our side and offered to pray with us, which we graciously accepted. Each minute seemed like an eternity. Finally, a nurse came out to tell us our baby was out of danger and was going to live. Thank you, Lord.

Miss Leeann is now two going on three and tells the boys to "top it" (short for stop it). When she call us she says "I wuv U." Any grandparent should be able to decipher that. She enjoys her lovey, (blanket) dancing on the coffee table, and has learned to dunk Oreo cookies with the boys. Quite the girl.

One day, Mike called us with this opening rhyme:

Roses are red
Violets are blue

Come this fall
There will be two!

Ok. Now that he had my attention he went on to say Julie had just failed the pregnancy test, and her penalty was nine months of growing, to end in September. What a way to tell your dad he's soon to be a grandfather again! (Sounds like a chip from the old block to me.)

The months rolled by. Unlike Tyler, Ryan and Leeann who were born Cesarean, we had to wait and guess on this one, as we did for Corinne and Michael. All indications were that he would arrive around the end of September or early October. We had planned to be there for the birth, but Julie had a few complications, as before. Off she went to the hospital before we could make it. Brady Michael Allen Clayton hit the ground running September 20, 1999. And he still hasn't stopped. His nickname is "Spark Plug". This guy is very active and keeps all around him alert. His fire engine red hair is indicative of his actions. He doesn't have any second gear in his system; he shifts right from low into overdrive and never misses a gear, although he does pop the clutch a lot. He's very loving and likes to tell Pappy "Wuv U" on the phone. Brady is the seventh generation of one boy per family. Since his great-great-grandfather, there never has been more than one boy born to a marriage. This lad has the challenge of keeping the Clayton name going, but I am quite sure he can do it.

My dream is for his children to pick this book up some day and ask who wrote it. He then will be able to say, "These are stories passed on from your great-grandfather."

I hope I didn't bore you with my grandchildren, but these little guys and gals need to be written and boasted about. Ask any of them what a noogie is and they will tell you. Even Little Bit will say "top it" and put her little hands on her head. They have all been rocked in "big blue and sat in the "hiney-hole" in the same chair with Pap where he can hug 'em well. If it sounds like I am proud of them and love them dearly, then I got my point across.

I want to thank our children for the wonderful job they have done in raising these kids. Thanks for giving them love and affection, for kissing those little scrapes and bruises and tucking them into bed each night with a loving kiss. Thanks for teaching them right from wrong, a prayer from a curse and letting them know they are loved. Thanks for telling them what a good swing they had when they struck out at bat, how good a "C" looked on their report card and how proud you were of them for drawing a stick man picture. Thanks for sending Nan and me pictures of our darlings and the cards for special occasions with the little hand-written signatures that only grandparents can decipher. Thanks for leaving your dad these sweet memories to replace some of the ones from my childhood.

The Twenty Third Psalm

Written for Nan

1 The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want

There were so many times in my life when I wanted, for a touch, a smile, or even a word of comfort from someone who loved me. My faith in God and His mercy satisfied my want as I cried out to Him to send me someone to help me make it through life and satisfy the thirst and hunger I held in my heart. My prayer was answered, as He sent Nan to me to show me He was indeed God and prayers were definitely heard by Him.

2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures
He leads me beside the still waters

Knowing the path in life I'd chosen, God had to mellow my heart to prepare me for the gift He had for me in Nan. This happened through many ways of Him laying me down in green pastures by means of health, the joy of adopting Kelley and Wendy and seeing my wife slowly leading me and nurturing me to the still waters of God's grace. Just as God never forces us into anything my wife used the same examples of love and affection to lead me to Christ, the still waters of my soul.

3 He restores my soul
He leads me in the path of righteousnes for his name's **sake**

After making a commitment to God, my life started to change. I felt

as though I had gone through complete restoration of my soul, thanks to God and my wife. I had gained new life and was born again which placed me in the path of righteousness of my Lord. God had to be proud of the handiwork He had accomplished with me. I only hope before I go to be with Him I can complete the cycle of what I have set out to do in following Him every minute of my life. This pathway laid before me somehow how to be collaboration between Nan and God, as they work the same from time to time.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
I shall fear no evil
For You are with me
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me

The valley of death would have been the Primrose Path given the walk I had experienced in my life. No, I did not fear evil, as I was too close to it for it to have an effect on me. Was God with me? Yes He was but I had convinced myself all through the walk in the valley I did not need Him or anyone else for that matter. I needed no protection from the rod and staff, for I had my own tools of protection, such as hatred, animosity and self-centeredness. I trusted no one as I walked this valley. Mistrust began with me at an early age and had caused me to treat everyone as though they could not be trusted. I still anguish with this characteristic but the love of my family is helping me to break the barrier. Oh God thank You so much for Your mercy on my soul to this point in my life and thank You for the lovely gift in Nan that You gave me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies
You anoint my head with oil
My cup runs over

The table set before me was not one I really was convinced I should feel comfortable joining. Why should I remove the protective shield I had built around me heart and soul and let anyone invade that privacy? In retrospect the table set before me was the life Nan con

vinced me I could have. It was she who showed me the presence of my enemies were not physical beings but the enemy of memory and old habits I had formed.
The anointing oil was the grace of God in bringing me this far and the love of Nan through truth and affection. This oil is still flowing by both of them but there are times I build a resistance to letting it penetrate me. My prayer is for the surface of my soul to soften to the place their love and anointing will flow freely though me.

Yes, my cup runs over and drinking from it has been abundant. I am enjoying the content more each day and although it is tasteless and colorless it still tends to bring warmth and even healing unto me. The content of the cup has been the love of God and Nan. The overflow is indicative of their efforts to "save a wretch like me.....Amazing Grace." They have given and poured abundantly. Thanks to both.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

I pray for my soul, just as I cried out to God to send Nan to my life. Forgive me dear God for the times I have fallen short. The goodness of Nan and the mercy of You have been a combination of things I never had in life until I met each of you. Why God was I chosen? Why have I been the one who accepted the goodness and mercy when there have been so many others who were more deserving. Am I to use the example of love You and Nan have expressed to me to heal my hurting heart from the past or is it to be used as a gift to pass on to others?

I do want to dwell in Your house forever and share eternal life with You, but I still feel I have fallen short of the accomplishments I needed to make. Help me please to overcome the lack of trust in others, the hurt and even hatred I have in my heart for some and forgiveness of the terrible sins of my life. Yes Lord, I want to someday live with You in Your house but until that time comes, help me to finish filling this house here on earth with love that Nan has helped me build.

My children and grandchildren have also been gifts of Your love and for that I give You thanks for. Help me be a role model for

them and have them also see the love through me that was given by You. I would appreciate many more years with Nan and if so granted please help me each day to let her know she is loved more than the day before but not as much as tomorrow.

WAITING ON THE WALL

This book is a collection of stories written about my life. If you have experienced any of the following, I suggest you read this:

Abandoned as a child due to divorce.

Told as a youngster "you will never amount to anything."

Loved by few but wanted affection.

Walked in denial of God.

I started writing this book as therapy for all the above reasons. The longer I typed the more satisfaction I gained. I realized I had something to say to others. There are so many people who are hurting... yet if they look back in their lives there were also some good things. The most important thing that has come of this is my trusting in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

Harry A. Clayton is a film and video producer for Thomas Nelson Publishing, the leader in the industry of Christian publishing. He spent his earlier life in a fortune 500 company, only to find life ha more purpose if he helped enrich the lives of others in his work. H and his wife Nancy live in Nashville, TN.

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